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SHORT STORIES.

No. 632.] For the Week Ending June 29th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

THE GOLDEN DWARF.

BEGINS TO-DAY.

"Don't look like that," Judith whispered, "pull yourself together."

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The Golden Dwarf

A Sensational Romance of To-Day.

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Author of "A Keeper of Secrets," "Hate, the Destroyer," "A Daughter of Mystery," etc.

CHAPTER I.

At the Cross-roads.

"Money, of course I want money; I don't usually remind you of my existence for any other reason. Besides, I said so in the letter."

"The letter you dated from London, yesterday, and posted here in the High Street—as the envelope shows—at twelve o'clock last night."

A moment's silence followed this unexpected answer. It was broken by a muttered oath and the fierce retort:

"You keep your prying eyes to yourself, my dear little sister, or I may have to teach you a lesson you won't forget in a hurry. The less respectable folk learn of Neal Garland's private life, Judith, the better for them. Now what cash have you brought? I want to get out of this villainous hole; I never was in it before and I never wish to be again."

Judith Garland studied her brother a moment, and then reluctantly, produced a fashionable purse of alligator-hide.

She was that magnificent creature, a handsome woman scarcely past her girlhood—dark-haired, dark-orbed, with resolute, scornful lips and a clear, yet dusky complexion. Her grey walking-costume, pretty hat, and frilled chiffon parasol suggested that her social position was a comfortable one.

The man at her elbow bore a certain resemblance to the woman he had just called "sister."

But his garments were threadbare and his felt bowler greased by long use, while his crumpled linen and soiled hands told a tale of squalid poverty.

Around this singular couple lay a sweep of pleasant English country—shone on by the blue sky of a fine July morning.

Close to, several thoroughfares met at an iron cross—most of them winding lanes with green borders, shut in by dense hedgerows, with now and then a stile, such as that against which Neal Garland—dingy, unkempt, miserable—was lounging.

The smart figure of the woman was almost concealed by the luxuriant fence of hawthorn, into whose shelter she had skilfully withdrawn herself.

Neal gazed hungrily at the coins his sister had emptied into her gloved palm. There were a brace of sovereigns and a florin or two. Judith gave him the yellow discs, sighing heavily as she relinquished them.

"Is that all you can raise?" he growled; "why it will scarcely do more than carry me up to town again. I asked for twenty pounds, you've let me have nothing for more than a year."

He pocketed, notwithstanding, the despised coins.

"It leaves me," responded Judith irritably; "just six shillings, and the first of the month is more than a week off. Neal, you didn't visit Wyresdale simply to plunder me; you'd have told me where to send the money or have followed your note and come by the morning express. To disguise the fact that you were here yesterday, spying on me, probably, you headed your letter (posted, and no doubt written, last night in Wyresdale) as if it had been dispatched from London. You might have remembered, all the same, that, as you'd never been to Wyresdale, you couldn't have appointed, before seeing the place, to meet me in this extremely convenient spot. However, if you won't explain, you won't."

Her brother scowled.

"You're a clever hussy, Judith," he said, "make yourself easy, I've not been worrying about you. Take my advice and don't poke your nose into my affairs."

"Then," observed Judith, patronisingly, "you will perhaps prove, in future, a more considerate correspondent, and not write to the great Lady Dering's companion in an unstamped envelope with a pencilled address. And, oh, I do hope, Neal, if you stopped at the village inn in that shabby state, you didn't give your name as Garland. If I hadn't been afraid of you doing something silly and damaging me irremediably with the Derings, I'd have taken no notice of your letter."

"Quite so," assented Neal; "that's why I proposed to collect the cash myself. As it happens, I haven't required an alias; I didn't stay at an inn, I was too hard up, I—I slept out."

"Good Heavens, where?" cried Judith.

Neal Garland jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

The gesture indicated an apparently endless wall of red brick, backed by lofty trees whose thick foliage murmured drowsily as the warm breeze fanned it.

"In there," he added drily.

"In there!" repeated his sister, astonished; "then you may be thankful you weren't caught in one of the Golden Dwarf's man-traps or worried by his dogs."

"Deuce take your local bogies," said Neal; "when can you let me have that other eighteen quid? I'm not going to part from Wyresdale without it if I'm forced to visit Dering House and request an interview with you at the front door."

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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Judith Garland quailed.

"Don't be insane, Neal," she begged; "do you want me to lose my position?"

"What do I care for your position?" demanded her brother, with brutal indifference; "there, I can't argue the matter, we're too public. I'll allow you till to-morrow night to fork out; I shall be at this stile by ten o'clock in the evening. And see you don't fool me or you'll repent it. I've got to have the money or I'm stranded."

"I haven't another half-sovereign in the world," said Judith, desperately; "you have left me six shillings and not a halfpenny more."

"Get an advance of salary," was the curt rejoinder.

"Impossible," declared Judith Garland; "Lady D. is in for a week of hysterics. Her husband went out riding yesterday afternoon and hasn't yet condescended to return; she is having the entire county searched for him. When he is unearthed, there'll be a storm, for Sir Christopher hates to appear ridiculous. No, this is decidedly not the time for Miss Judith Garland, who is only my lady's genteel dependant, to solicit an advance of salary, or, indeed, apply for any sort of favour."

"Very well," said Neal, savagely; "get the tin how and where you choose; I must have it. You know me of old. By-bye, till ten to-morrow evening."

He took a stride athwart the strip of ragged turf that fringed the dusty macadam. Suddenly pausing, he retraced his steps.

"I say," he ejaculated; "what on earth did you mean by your fairy story about dogs and man-traps and a golden dwarf?"

His sister pointed to the blank red wall which formed a huge angle opposite them. "That is Wyresdale Park," she answered; "the home of Mr. Otto Hare. He is enormously rich and lives there shut up from the world, cursing the fate that denied him the ordinary stature of his sex. Otto Hare, my dear Neal, is the Golden Dwarf and the Golden Dwarf is Mr. Otto Hare—golden because of his wealth and dwarf because of his inches."

"And the man-traps and dogs?" queried Neal Garland. He was knitting his black brows in a curiously abstracted frown.

"For the benefit of inquisitive trespassers," said Judith: "Neal," she added bitterly, "I could wish that you had come by your death in Wyresdale Park!" She set her gleaming teeth at the words and her nostrils dilated with dangerous passion.

Neal laughed contemptuously. "I believe," he told her, "if I had asked you for fifty pounds you would have done for me yourself. But as it's only twenty you'll grumble and—find it. Thanks for the tip about the bow-wows and the infernal machines; it may prove useful."

He waved a mocking palm and slouched off. The graceful figure of Judith Garland shrank hastily into the shelter of the hawthorn hedge; the sound of a horse's hoofs had fallen upon her ear. She lowered her fleecy parasol and peered out, cautiously. A mounted man, young, gallant, booted and spurred, was cantering towards the cross-roads.

A strange light leapt into Judith's striking countenance and her dark cheeks glowed.

"Felix Dering!" she murmured, and took an impulsive step into the open. Her grey dress made her a conspicuous object, the horseman drew rein, lifted his cap and sprang from his saddle.

Judith Garland went to the rustic stile over which she had so recently been conversing with her brother. An expression of surprise and disappointment shadowed the other's face, but it vanished before Judith perceived it.

"Good morning, Miss Garland," he said, passing an arm through the bridle of his chestnut; "you are abroad early."

Judith was studying him admiringly—he was a good-looking, athletic Saxon, with a powerful chin, grey eyes, and a strong, straight nose.

"Yes," she admitted, indolently; "I cannot stand Lady Dering without an occasional interval. By-the-way, what has your uncle done with himself?"

"Done," repeated the master of the chestnut, patting his steed nervously; "is he—indisposed?"

"That is the question," pursued Judith; "no one has seen him since yesterday afternoon, and Lady Dering is distracted. You are almost as serious a delinquent, Mr. Dering."

"Oh, I rode into Duchester," rejoined Felix Dering, colouring; "I got detained and stayed at an hotel."

"Was the quarrel as bad as that?" inquired Judith Garland: "forgive me, Mr. Dering, I couldn't help guessing that Sir Christopher and you had had a—a misunderstanding."

Felix sighed heavily.

"Yes," he owned; "I had a fight for my freedom; luckily, I conquered. I am actually to be permitted to seek my own fortune for myself; but, unless he relents, without my uncle's blessing. And I fear he will not forgive me until he obtains an equally satisfactory steward for the Dering estate. But what can have kept him from home all night?—he must have met with some accident."

"He imitated your example," said Judith, calmly; "ordered his horse and galloped away from Dering House, to work off his irritation, I imagine. And, like you, he must have been in the mood to shun the domestic hearth. Lady Dering is trying when one's nerves are not in the best condition. For the last eight hours she has been wildly hysterical."

"No wonder you show signs of strain," said Felix Dering, gazing down the chief of the sunny thoroughfares; he was scrutinising a low white villa, which basked in the July heat within a stone's throw of the iron cross that marked the junction of the ways.

Judith was consulting her own thoughts; abruptly she covered her pretty features with a fluttering handkerchief.

"It's—it's not altogether Lady Dering," she sobbed; "it's my—my brother; oh, Mr. Dering, I am in such trouble."

Felix was startled; he hated tears cordially, as do most of the sterner sex. "What have we friends for, Miss Garland," he said, cheerfully; "if not to aid us in our troubles? I may be able to help you; if so, you must count on me."

"He has written," faltered Judith, pathetically, "to say that he is in terrible straits for—for twenty pounds and—and Lady Dering, in her present mood, won't advance me a penny of my salary."

Her affectation of sisterly grief touched Felix Dering's chivalrous heart. He flushed with embarrassment. "Don't be offended, Miss Garland," he stammered; "but, do you know, I should be delighted to lend you that amount if—if you would accept it from me."

Judith shook her head. Much as she needed the sum—for Neal, as he had said, was bound to revenge himself if she should fail him—she was shrewd enough to hang back. "I am grateful, Mr. Dering," she answered; "very, very grateful; but I don't think I ought to—to—"

"To take a loan from me?" said Felix; "nonsense, you must let me give you a cheque and not worry yourself about any foolish conventionalities. You shall have it as soon as I reach the house, where Saladin is anxious to be. Now not another word, please."

He swung himself into the saddle and, with a frank salute, put the chestnut in motion. Judith watched him—through a mist of real tears.

"How I loathe myself for deceiving him," she muttered; "oh, I love you, Felix Dering, though you do not love me. And yet, I fancy I could teach you to."

She checked herself. A hundred yards past the stile

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Saladin had been reined in and once more Felix Dering had dismounted. He was not alone; someone in a muslin gown and a flapping Leghorn held the chestnut by the bridle and offered daintily to his twitching muzzle a lump of sugar. And Saladin's master had drawn very near to the charming ministrant.

Judith Garland pressed her gloved fingers to her side. "It is the little Carew girl," she muttered; "so Sir Christopher was right, Felix has thrown up his post, his allowance and the chance of a rich marriage, for the sake of a designing widow's bashful daughter. Felix, my friend, you are a bigger fool than I thought."

She crept from hedge to hedge till she could distinguish their voices.

"We shall not be able to enjoy many more of these stolen minutes with you—Saladin and I," Felix was saying tenderly; "I am to have my liberty, Esther, I am going out into the world to seek my fortune—the fortune that will permit me to claim you for my wife."

Esther Carew's delicate skin blanched and the sweet morsel she was offering to the chestnut rolled from her hand—Saladin bent his proud head reproachfully to pick it up.

"Oh, Felix!" she cried; "then Sir Christopher would not consent."

"To my wedding you?" finished her lover; "no, he proved obdurate. There were two or three moneyed maidens, he assured me, dying for a single glance of mine, in spite of the fact that his second marriage and the advent of my small cousin Brian have practically disinherited me. He tells me that if I enter into an alliance with one of the fair and moneyed damsels he will squeeze me out a few thousands. If not, I may say farewell to Wyresdale, and he will get a professional steward and farm-bailiff in my stead. Which person, I informed him, he might advertise for immediately. And, with that, we separated, and I rode into Duchester and instructed my banker to sell some stock I have. Don't be too grieved, dearest, I am going to—to British Columbia, to a mining chum out there."

Esther laid her arms against the chestnut's neck; she could not speak. Saladin turned to gaze at her in wonderment.

"Do not weep, my darling," besought Felix, huskily; "it's hard for both of us, but I'll be back soon, please Heaven, to take you over with me."

The shining curls lifted themselves, and a pair of blue eyes, wide and dewy, met those of Felix Dering.

"I will be brave," gasped Esther; "it seems so impossible—as if it couldn't be true. Oh, Felix, my darling!"

She was struggling with her misery, her bosom heaving, her hands clasped determinedly. Overcome, Felix plucked a hawthorn twig and stripped it mechanically of its leaves.

"I must run in," said Esther, controlling herself at length; "mother will be missing me, and I shall be better when I've had a quiet cry all to myself. Why did you ever grow fond of me, Felix, it has caused you nothing but unhappiness."

"Has it?" replied Felix, fondly; "you poor child, I would not be without my unhappiness—if you will call it so—for all the wealth of the—the Golden Dwarf."

He stooped, hidden by Saladin's tall withers, and kissed his betrothed. The gentle echo of that kiss stung Judith Garland to the quick. Biting her lip savagely, she retreated from the species of bower that had enabled her to spy upon the lovers, and hurried along the bye-path in the direction of Dering House, whose ivied turrets topped the crest of an intervening knoll.

Felix mounted his horse and, not daring to glance behind him, dashed into a gallop. Esther sank down on the grassy wayside, shaken by a storm of sorrow.

Suddenly there broke upon the air a succession of penetrating sounds, short and crisp, like a series of pistol-shots, and over the long red wall opposite her bounded the lithe yet clumsy body of a huge dog—one of those splendid, if ferocious, mongrels bred for sentinel duty. Seeing Esther, it commenced to bay loudly, plunging hither and thither in frantic and terrifying excitement. The girl screamed, and her persecutor redoubled its gigantic gambols.

Before Esther could repeat her shriek of fright, the wall had been scaled from within by a remarkable personage, who dropped, with much agility, into the road. The new arrival was a tiny being, less than four feet in stature, though perfectly proportioned and even handsome. He wore a stylish morning suit of tweed and a crush hat of the same material, and grasped a formidable whip, that indicated the origin of the piercing reports which had preceded the brute's excursion into the open.

The wielder of this article cracked threateningly its heavy and supple thong, but the boisterous animal, waxing angry, encountered him with dripping, defiant jaws. The other abandoned the whip, and flinging himself at the beast, clutched it by the throat. A brief contest ensued and the dog rolled to the ground, its tongue lolling out. Esther had risen, and made an amazed spectator of the combat.

The victor thrust the brute from him and, raising his hat, advanced to the bewildered girl.

"I am Otto Hare, at your service," he said bowing; "may I not know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking?"

Esther surveyed him, fascinated. This, then, was the Golden Dwarf, the wealthy recluse of Wyresdale Park, who, to escape the inquisitive glances of more ordinary mortals, had shut himself in his own ample domains—domains of whose mystery and grandeur the Wyresdale folk had so many and such conflicting versions. She scanned him covertly, feeling an indescribable alarm. Otto Hare's countenance was sombre and repellent, classic as was his profile and distinguished as were his bearing and manners. There was something in his cold, proud aspect that recalled the stern egotism of Napoleon.

"My name is Carew," responded Esther, shrinkingly.

"I trust you are not injured in any way," continued the Golden Dwarf, "by Cerberus here—he is a brute one should never retreat from. Had you merely walked towards him and struck him with your finger-tips, he would have fawned on you like a kitten. Come, sir!"

The dog crawled up, whimpering; Otto Hare teased it for an instant, and dismissed it with a haughty gesture and a grim smile. Crestfallen, Cerberus shambled from his tamer's vision.

"You are not the stranger to me you would suppose, Miss Carew," proceeded the Golden Dwarf, "I have often seen you from my watch-tower—it is beyond those trees, at this end of my park. I know that you reside at that white villa behind you, and I forced Cerberus to jump the wall that I might obtain the honour of your acquaintance. For the first time in fifteen years I find myself upon a public thoroughfare."

Esther shivered—he had stepped in front of her and was gazing intently into her face. A strident howl from Cerberus diverted his attention; the dog was disappearing down a dry ditch that flanked the irregular lane, almost concealed by the mass of trailing greenery depending from the luxuriant hedge-row. A moment later the brute emerged by Otto Hare, dividing the briars and nettles as it sought to climb out. Halting with its paws on the brink of the trench, it howled again.

"What ails the beast?" said the Golden Dwarf pettishly. He strode forward to ascertain, but reeled back, pale and tottering.

Esther looked and sickened at the sight. In the shallow ditch lay the corpse of a man—a well-dressed man with iron-grey hair and staring brown pupils. About his mouth

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and nose was tightly fastened a red cotton handkerchief. Upon his brow was a smear of clotted blood.

Esther Carew recoiled.

"It—it is Sir Christopher Dering!" she whispered.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN WITH ONE ARM.

"IT must have been robbery, Geddes, and highway robbery at that. Everyone says so, and Caleb Forester doesn't set himself up to be wiser than his neighbours. Why should you want any other reason—isn't robbery enough?"

The speaker's tone trembled fretfully, he had the stooping figure, ragged silver locks, and twitching, nervous limbs of age. At the moment he was taking snuff from a tiny black coffer, ornamented with flying swallows in mother-of-pearl. The operation concluded, he got out a voluminous handkerchief and flicked the dropped grains from the lapels of his velvet jacket.

"Maybe," was the quiet answer, delivered in a strong, if cultivated, Scotch accent, "and maybe not. You see, Mr. Forester——" here came a pause while the stopper of a glass phial, just withdrawn, after many attempts, from the socket, was tapped against that receptacle to separate the white crystals inside, "it isn't natural to conclude that a big man such as Sir Christopher, mounted on a powerful horse, should have been worsted by a tramp with a cudgel."

The old chemist made an irritable movement.

"You're too clever by half, Archibald Geddes," he told his assistant, "wasn't Sir Christopher discovered with a fracture in his skull and a folded handkerchief tied tightly over his mouth and nose? And wasn't his horse found running loose in a field, with the saddle and bridle hid under a hedge by the gate. The squire must have been attacked unexpectedly as he was riding home, stunned by the blow, dragged to the ground and smothered. It's highway robbery on the face of it—Sir Christopher's watch and money were gone."

Geddes weighed a proportion of the crystals he had been extracting from the phial, emptied them into a squat bottle, marked it, and began to parcel it up. He had labelled it "Poison."

"Had anyone a grudge against Sir Christopher?" he inquired, abstractedly.

Caleb Forester walked to the door of his shop and looked out into the principal street of Wyresdale. Its prim shops and houses basked in the morning sunlight, and its freshly-watered pavements were clean and cool.

"The squire hadn't an enemy in the world," he responded huskily—his back to Archibald Geddes.

The young Scotchman deposited in the shallow cupboard behind him the phial he had been using.

"Well, it's a queer business, Mr. Forester," he decided; "but I'll give you one piece of information you can depend upon. Sir Christopher was not mounted when he received that blow on the head which fractured his skull. No, nor was he standing either—he was lying down."

"It—it is Sir Christopher Dering!" she gasped.

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The chemist started.

"How—how do you make that out?" he faltered.

Geddes leaned on the counter and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Because," he said, "Sir Christopher's skull was split from the nape of the neck to the top of the forehead. Ask any smart doctor—only we haven't one in Wyresdale—whether a fracture of that kind can be produced unless the patient's head is resting upon a firm support. Now, would a robber on foot have dragged the squire off his horse, have thrown him down, and then—and not till then—have stunned him with some blunt instrument. Supposing it all done however, why should he go on to commit murder as well as robbery?"

A species of shudder passed over Caleb Forester.

"He had to," murmured the chemist; "Sir Christopher would have been able to identify him."

"Not unless the moon was clear or the night scarcely fallen," persisted Geddes, obstinately; "there is only a single wretched lamp at the cross-roads. But granting that the double crime seemed necessary, why was the murderer careful to smother his victim? Surely strangling would have been the more probable method. Indeed, I can't believe myself that the handkerchief fastened over Sir Christopher's mouth and nostrils was capable of causing death by suffocation. It was just a common thin coloured one—like—like that you're carrying."

The chemist shrank away, stuffing into his pocket the bandanna pointed at by his assistant.

"You've got this murder on your brain, Geddes," he retorted feverishly; "let's change the subject—here's Connie."

Caleb Forester turned to meet his daughter—a graceful, brown-skinned girl with a shrewd, frank bearing.

"Your breakfast is waiting, father," she said brightly.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear," stammered Caleb; "I'll come in and get it." And he went unsteadily through the private door which led to the dwelling in the rear of the shop. Connie did not accompany him, but sought the shelter of the mahogany screen that concealed the dispensing-table. Archibald Geddes joined her casually.

"Good-morning, Mr. Geddes," observed Connie, interlacing her fingers in an embarrassed fashion.

"Good-morning, Miss Connie," said the assistant, endeavouring to possess himself of a firm, small palm.

Constance Forester evaded him with a reproving yet coquettish glance.

The Scotchman ignored his defeat diplomatically. "Mr. Forester's breakfast hour is nearer other folks lunch-time than ever, I'm thinking," he intimated grimly.

"Yes," admitted the girl, sighing, "he was out dreadfully late last night—discussing the murder, he told me, at the Wheatsheaf. He's growing worse and worse, Mr. Geddes."

"He's not growing any better, Miss Connie," was the reluctant answer; "but you mustn't lose heart; I'll keep the business together for you.' Archibald Geddes coughed diffidently. "You'll not mind my saying," he ventured, "how great a pleasure it is to me to be of any service to you—to your own self?"

Constance Forester blushed. "You're very thoughtful," she said, "and it is a comfort to know that somebody isn't in danger of being killed with the wrong physic when father is confused—to be honest, Mr. Geddes, when he's drunk."

At last Geddes captured and pressed sympathetically a warm little hand. Connie suffered him to retain it for a fraction of a minute before disengaging it. The Scotchman ruffled his curly hair.

"I had a serious trial yesterday, Miss Connie," he proceeded, "and that was to take my tea without you to pour it out for me. I am hoping to be spared that affliction this afternoon. The back-parlour isn't itself in your absence."

Connie laughed. But she was pleased, nevertheless.

"I am sorry, Mr. Geddes," she declared, "but really Esther—I mean Miss Carew—wanted me so badly, poor dear! To see that strange Mr. Hare and find Sir Christopher's dead body all in a breath was a bit upsetting. And Esther and I have been like sisters since we were babies; my mother was Mrs. Carew's nurse-maid till she married father."

Archibald Geddes wrinkled his brows.

"You know what is being said in the village?" he asked, "that Mr. Dering, Sir Christopher's nephew, quarrelled with his uncle on Miss Carew's account only the day before he was picked up dead. Both of them rode away from Dering House after the quarrel and neither returned the same night. In the morning—yesterday morning, that is—the squire was found murdered."

Connie Forester's pretty face became suddenly stern and cold.

"Mr. Geddes," she cried, "if you can repeat those cruel words or tell me that you believe what they might be made to mean, you are no friend of mine. So there!" And allowing him no opportunity to respond or explain, she disappeared into the house, very proud and disdainful.

The assistant spun sharply round—a convenient mirror, fixed at an angle, permitted him to see that a customer had entered the shop.

This was a sturdy fellow, of medium height, who boasted a slouch-hat, a suit of shabby indigo serge, a complexion the tint of leather, and a greasy bullet-head. At some period or other he had experienced the loss of an arm, the remainder dangled from his left shoulder an empty sleeve. He progressed with a roll that might have been due to a sea-faring habit, or to that and intoxication. Geddes regained his usual position at the counter.

"Give me something to settle my internals, sonny," said the new-comer, roughly, "I've a touch of the malary hanging round me—a souveneer of the Brazils, which is a plaguey treacherous part of the world for climate, as you may have heard on. I've been splicing the mainbrace these two days and reckon I've caught a chill, though I've a rotten memory for what I do in my liquor."

Geddes began to mix a draught in a miniature tumbler with a frosted measurement-scale on the side.

"Say," broke out his uncouth patron; "how long is it since Caleb got the number of his mess—passed in his checks, died, savvy?"

The Scotchman handed over the fragile vessel; it was clutched in a knotted fist and drained in a twinkling.

"Mr. Forester is still alive," replied Geddes, solemnly, scrutinising the square frame and notable breadth of the drinker.

"Oh, is he?" queried the one-armed man, relinquishing the delicate goblet; "then you can tip him the wink that Nick Foley has been clipped of a fin and is ashore for good. He'll remember me, will Caleb Jehoshophat, to think that he's been stewing in this flypot of a village, peddling salts and senna, while Nicholas Foley has been sailing the stormy sea, North, South, East and West"—he waved his fist to each quarter of the compass as he mentioned it, then interrupted himself. "The world's a rum place," he added with a fierce scowl, "but we've no call to argue about it—least said, soonest mended."

He flung half-a-crown on the rubber cash-pad, collected his change and made for the street. He had not reached it when the threshold of Caleb Forester's shop was crossed by an exceedingly tall and rather stout person, in a flapping frock-coat, baggy trousers, and a soft hat of black straw. The most recent arrival had a strikingly arched nose, a clean-shaven, smiling mouth, close cropped-hair and yellow eyes, fenced with glittering spectacles.

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At sight of this singular apparition Nicholas Foley dodged, shook his bullet-head, and retreated, blinking incredulously. But he did not continue his exit, instead, he slunk into a recess formed by a projecting stack of shelves, from which he peered forth, surveying, with a peculiar anxiety, the bulky frame in its ample vestments.

"Morning again, Professor," remarked Archibald Geddes, upon whom the conduct of the one-armed sailor had not been wasted; "I worked the stopper out at last—it hadn't been touched for six months."

He unfastened the cupboard at his back and produced the packet he had wrapped up during his conversation with Caleb Forester.

"Half an ounce, sir," he said; "I have only kept a grain or two in case it should be wanted. But it isn't often prescribed in Wyresdale."

"And the price?" demanded the other, laconically.

His pronounciation of the final word revealed his origin—he was a German.

"Fifteen shillings," was the rejoinder.

"It is very dear," grumbled the other, but he paid the amount.

Geddes laid a book upon the counter, opened at a ruled page. He had filled in certain of the blanks—they recorded the date and stated that half an ounce of hydrochlorate of cocaine had been sold by Archibald Geddes to—the space for the name of the purchaser was unoccupied. The German took the offered pen and wrote, "Joseph Kraft, M.D. Brux, Wyresdale Park." Stowing away the package, he nodded curtly to the assistant and took a leisurely exit.

The sailor leapt to the threshold and gazed after him. Then he strode to the counter, where Geddes was putting back the poison-register.

"Who was that?" he desired excitedly.

The young Scotchman answered drily:

"That is no ordinary person," he said; "it is Professor Kraft, Mr. Otto Hare's own particular resident doctor, and a famous specialist, we're assured, on the Continent. If you know Wyresdale you know who Mr. Otto Hare is. Well, Professor Kraft lives with Mr. Hare at Wyresdale Park and he's done now, oh, a year or more. And some very uncanny drugs he finds occasion for," reflected the assistant to himself in an undertone; "he has enough cocaine there now to kill twenty men."

Nicholas Foley had been devoting but slight attention to the latter section of the Scotchman's explanation. He whistled shrilly, slapped his thigh with his horny palm and vanished out of the shop. Geddes hurried to the entrance, ostensibly to lower the sun-blind, in reality to glance after the one-armed man. He was trotting along the High street—in the wake of Professor Kraft, the mysterious resident physician to Mr. Otto Hare, of Wyresdale Park, otherwis the Golden Dwarf.

They had travelled—pursuer and pursued—beyond the limits of the young Scotchman's vision, out of the High Street itself, and into the deserted roads at the end of the village, before the sailor, quickening his pace, drew level with the German and tapped him on the shoulder. The Professor turned; nothing in his sleek countenance betrayed the least recognition of the man who had accosted him.

Nicholas Foley sneered. "Come on, Dutchy!" he cried, bullyingly; "if you don't remember me you ought to. Why, I was on the *Simla* when you ran that rummy cargo of yours. You're fatter, Dutchy, but you're the same man."

Not a muscle stirred in the German's face. He studied the sailor with his dull yellow eyes, veiled by the gleaming lenses of his spectacles.

"You always puzzled me above a bit, Dutchy," he was told; "see here, it can't do any harm now. What was your little game? Guns I can savvy, *and* grog, but what the dickens did you want with them there?—ha, ha!" And Nicholas Foley collapsed in a paroxysm of mirth. A troubled light showed itself transiently in the German's eyes.

"On the cross it was, somehow, Dutchy," said the sailor; "that much I figured out long ago, and seeing you in the physic shop so spick and span, made me wonder what it would be worth to remind you of it. You yourself," he added, significantly, "and no one else."

The German parted his smiling lips. "You are mistaken, my good friend," he answered; "I have never seen you before. But even if we were the best of acquaintances it would not be prudent to remind me of anything I greatly wished to forget. Should you meet the gentleman whom I evidently resemble, and to whom your extremely interesting conversation refers, I should not advise you to molest him, either. He might be tempted to give you in charge to the local police, who, at present, owing to an atrocious murder having taken place in the neighbourhood, are taking much interest in suspicious characters."

As he uttered this final sentence, the smile died from his features, and they distorted into so vicious an expression that Nicholas Foley recoiled. The Professor walked on resuming in an instant his former bland demeanour.

"Curse him!" hissed the sailor, "he'd have me swung if he could. The tricky land-pirate! I might have known he wouldn't heave-to for a shot across his bows. But, by the living jingo, I'll get to wind'ard of him and have a squint at his papers."

He began, with considerable skill, to track the large, stout form of the German, who was entering an iron wicket in the interminable wall that skirted the road. The sailor waited until this entrance had been closed, then he scaled it nimbly and continued his chase.

Behind the wall was a belt of lofty trees, past them a stretch of meadow, rising to a substantial hill, through whose green summit broke irregularly the grey limestone of the district. The slope of this huge eminence bore a massive and unfamiliar type of structure, rectangular and embattled like a fort, but with a single wide tower. Into a door at the base of the latter the German was just disappearing.

Nicholas Foley scratched his head.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered, "I'll bet that's new since I left Wyresdale. What can Dutchy be up to? And what has he to do with Otto Hare?"

While he gazed, a deep bark fell upon his ear. Over the meadow, escorted by the ferocious mongrel which had so alarmed Esther Carew, was strolling a tiny figure—the figure of the Golden Dwarf. The dog, awakened to the presence of the sailor, was bounding towards him with gigantic strides; Kraft, recalled by the brute's clamour, had just stepped forth again into the open.

Nicholas Foley whipped out a clasp-knife, opened it with his teeth, and, as the creature—trained to show no mercy to trespassers—hurled itself at his throat, he fell on one knee and buried the blade in its abdomen. The animal rolled over, writhing. Springing to his feet, the sailor fled like the wind. Nor did he pause until he was outside the perilous limits of Wyresdale Park.

This done, he proved to be not far from the cross-roads, and struck at once down the narrowest of the converging lanes. As he scudded between its dense hedgerows, he espied a ruinous thatched cottage, fronted by a strip of neglected garden. Nicholas Foley shifted his course, ran up to the battered door, which was flanked by shuttered windows, and, lifting his heel, drove in the lock. Another second and he was safe from observation.

Not before night had descended upon Wyresdale did he venture to leave his hiding-place. Then, very cautiously, he let himself out and stole athwart the fields, prowling like a lean wolf. He was maddeningly hungry.

The sailor was about to force his way through a hawthorn fence on to a dusky footpath when a voice arrested him. It was a man's voice, subdued but distinct, and it said:

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"You're a marvel, Judith—that is, if the cheque is in order, a question I'll settle in a jiffey." There was the spurt of a match and a faint glow behind the hedge. "Felix Dering—twenty pounds to bearer—yesterday's date," read the speaker. "All correct," he went on, "and now, I'll be off. Bye-bye; thanks for the cash."

"Stay," answered a woman's quiet tones, "Neal Garland, what do you know of the murder of Sir Christopher Dering?"

CHAPTER III.

"Mr. Otto Hare."

As the name was uttered a door swung to behind the singular figure of the Golden Dwarf.

He stood in a pleasant, low-ceiled apartment, through whose large windows might have been perceived the green hedges and dusty macadam of the cross-roads.

Nearer still, was visible a pair of magnificent roan cobs, harnessed to a four-wheeled, hooded vehicle, and fretting at the way-side in charge of a groom.

Their owner, Mr. Otto Hare, had just entered the drawing room of the white villa.

A woman rose to greet him—a woman with raven tresses, a sallow complexion, vigilant dark eyes, and the thin, restless lips of selfish middle-age.

She had been reading; her book lay on the gipsy table by her bent-wood rocking-chair.

"I trust you will forgive this unceremonious visit from a stranger," said the Golden Dwarf, bowing; "but I felt anxious to assure myself that Miss Carew had not suffered as the result of a shock, for which, I fear, I was, in a measure, responsible. Believe me, I am most grieved that so charming a young lady should have been inadvertently brought into contact with such an awful event."

An odd expression flashed into Mrs. Carew's astute countenance; she looked at him—covertly, but searchingly. It was the first occasion upon which any matron in Wyresdale had been able to scrutinise the small, saturnine features of its richest resident.

"You must not do yourself an injustice, Mr. Hare," she answered; "dear Esther had only herself to blame; she wanders about far too freely and I am in constant dread of something terrible happening to her. She is so dreamy and romantic! But pray be seated."

The Golden Dwarf chose out the least elevated of the settees around him and sank among its cushions—a strange figure, athletic though diminutive, stunted yet graceful. His hostess resumed her position in the rocking-chair.

"Do not blame Miss Carew," protested Otto Hare, lightly, "for a habit which has procured me the honour of her, and of your, acquaintance."

"The privilege is ours," replied Mrs. Carew. There was a sort of suppressed excitement in her voice; she was keenly awake to the envy which the news of the Golden Dwarf's call at the white villa would kindle in the breasts of her social rivals. Henceforth, Mrs. Carew of the "Rosery" would be a personage in Wyresdale.

Otto Hare shrugged his shoulders. "It is very good of you to believe so," he said, answering her polite protest; "I am a man, Mrs. Carew, who can boast of few friends, and who, indeed, has rather desired to escape friendship than to seek it. For fifteen years I have not passed my own park-wall."

The piercing orbs under the smooth brow of Mrs. Carew were illuminated by a faint smile.

"You have been a determined recluse, truly," she yielded; "and a ghastly affair it is which has brought you out into the world again. It was most thoughtful of you to send Esther in at once on that distressing morning when Sir Christopher was found!"

The Golden Dwarf sighed. "Poor Dering!" he rejoined; "I was one of the last to meet him alive."

"You!" queried Mrs. Carew, incredulously.

"Yes," said Otto Hare: "For several years now he has played a weekly bout of chess with me. We originally interviewed one another over a boundary dispute that our lawyers could not settle—the Dering lands march with mine—and I found him a genial fellow, though a trifle choleric. A fiercely-contested game absorbed us both on what was, apparently, the night of his death, and he only left Wyresdale Park in time, as he admitted, to be late for dinner."

"How inexplicable the whole occurrence seems!" observed Mrs. Carew, yawning; "I shall be glad when everything is over and done with. The inquiry does not begin till to-morrow."

The Golden Dwarf stroked a corner of his firm mouth. "It is not improbable, I gather," he pursued, "that we may be treated to some extremely sensational developments."

His hostess leaned forward in her swaying lounge. "You don't mean that there is a clue to the robber!" she cried.

Otto Hare indulged in a cynical grimace.

"The robber, dear Mrs. Carew!" he said; "yours is scarcely the accepted theory. The crime, according to the gossips, is wilful murder!"

"But who *can* have wished to murder Sir Christopher?" was the astonished retort.

"Anybody might who had quarrelled with him seriously," asserted the Golden Dwarf; "Dering could be irritable and obstinate to a degree. My friend, Dr. Kraft, who is my newsmonger, tells me there is talk of a grave breach having taken place (only a few hours before his death) between Sir Christopher and—but I am on the point of being indiscreet. The gentleman may be a friend of yours."

Mrs. Carew's sallow skin flushed with impatience. "Oh, do satisfy my curiosity," she pleaded, "a breach between Sir Christopher and—whom?"

Otto Hare lowered his polished tones to a malicious whisper.

"Mr. Felix Dering!" he concluded.

His hostess gasped. "You amaze me," she murmured; "surely you are misinformed."

"Dr. Kraft is never misinformed," persisted the Golden Dwarf, calmly. "Wyresdale is ringing with the rumour. It is even explained that the quarrel related to a young lady with whom Mr. Dering is supposed to be smitten. And now I recollect," he hesitated, affecting an air of embarrassment, "her name was—Mrs. Carew, how can I apologise sufficiently to you and to your daughter?"

Mrs. Carew shot a quick glance at the speaker, she fancied she could detect his motive in what she guessed to be an adroit piece of acting. He must be anxious to discover her attitude towards Felix Dering's interest in Esther, her intuition was confirmed that he—the millionaire proprietor of Wyresdale Park—had been attracted by her daughter.

"You owe us no apology, Mr. Hare," she said, with a tact equal to his own; "Mr. Dering is but superficially known to Esther and I. Gossip exaggerates so absurdly! No, Esther is not the girl to bestow her heart against my advice, and I could never consent to her marrying Mr. Dering. Why, he has been no better than Sir Christopher's steward since the birth of the second Lady Dering's little son, Brian. In any case, this dreadful allegation to which you refer——"

The Golden Dwarf sprang to his feet. "*S-s-h!* here is Miss Carew," he said warningly, and moved to the short flight of broad steps which led from the conservatory to the rear of the apartment. Upon the carpeted stair Esther had paused, gazing at the unexpected visitor in a species of affright. The sunshine from the arched roof of glass at her

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back streamed down upon her, glistening in her fair curls and making her muslin gown like silk.

Otto Hare had taken an impetuous stride in the direction of this pretty picture.

"Esther," said his hostess, "this is Mr. Hare, whom you saw the other day. He has very kindly called to ask after you."

Esther Carew moved reluctantly down the steps. The radiance faded from her as she glided into the shadow of the drawing-room and approached the tiny form of the Golden Dwarf.

"I wished, Miss Carew," continued Otto Hare, "to express my regret that I should have been the means of associating you, however slightly, with a certain melancholy affair. Cerberus has had cause to repent his impulsive nature—he will leap no more walls and inspect no more ditches."

"You—you have killed him!" stammered the girl, recoiling.

The Golden Dwarf made a gesture of protest; his features grew suddenly harsh and menacing. "It was not I," he responded, "nor was it by my leave. Enough that the brute has expiated his fault."

"Why should it have been a fault," said Esther surprised, "to show us where Sir Christopher was?" Her sweet voice broke.

"When I think of that awful moment," she faltered, "everything starts up before me and I see him again, lying there so frightfully straight and quiet, with the handkerchief fastened over his mouth, and the blood on his forehead."

She put her soft palms to her delicate, horror-stricken face. Her emotion infected Otto Hare, and he shuddered.

"I remind you of a painful episode, Miss Carew," he told her nervously. "That is my misfortune. I shall hope, in the immediate future, to create some happier connections between us. Do not deny me, I beg, the necessary opportunities."

He picked his crush hat from the settee.

"Mrs. Carew," he said, "I can only bring myself to say *au revoir*; Miss Carew, I am your humble servant."

The Golden Dwarf took his somewhat abrupt departure with well-bred ease. The elder woman stole to the window, and watched him as he was whirled off in his dashing "spider" phaeton behind the spirited cobs. He was driving himself, the reins tense in his small fingers, the fleet creatures chafing at his iron grasp.

Mrs. Carew went back to her daughter, and drew her into an affectionate embrace.

"You lucky, lucky girl," she cried, "there goes the wealthiest bachelor in Derbyshire, and he has taken a fancy to you."

Esther gazed at her mother—astounded, yet indefinably alarmed.

"Of course, he is exceptionally short," proceeded Mrs. Carew, regaining her seat and rocking lazily, "but very handsome, and with delightful manners. He cannot have less than fifty thousand a year, and most of it will have accumulated, though he is reputed to spend untold sums on the park. Play your cards as I bid you, and you shall be its mistress."

The listener shrank away, trembling.

"Mamma," she exclaimed, "you don't imagine——! Oh, I couldn't care for that man; it is ridiculous!"

She burst into a peal of hysterical laughter.

"And yet," she added, checking herself, "he frightens me, for all he is so little—his eyes are cruel and his mouth, when he is angry, sets like a vice. If you had only seen him conquer that dog of his the day we found Sir Christopher!"

Mrs. Carew got up, smilingly. "My dear child," she said, "we women end by liking a strong character. And then, fifty thousand a year!—what personal peculiarities would not such a consideration outweigh?"

Esther faced her mother bravely. "It is not right," she urged, "to assume that Mr. Hare wishes to marry me just because he has called and been inquisitive. But even if he does, I—I love Felix—Mr. Dering."

"Let us hear no more of Mr. Dering," commanded Mrs. Carew, with a frown. "Luckily, I refused to sanction any engagement on the score of your youth. It was prudent, I admit, not to repulse him, so long as Brian Dering was a mere baby and he might possibly become heir to his uncle's property. Mr. Hare is evidently aware of his attentions to you, and, most correctly, probed me on the subject, I answered that Mr. Dering was a superficial acquaintance and had no claim upon you whatever."

"Mamma!" cried Esther, "you did not—you could not!"

"I did," insisted Mrs. Carew, "and very wisely. Have you heard that Mr. Dering is actually suspected of Sir Christopher's murder. Wyresdale is ringing with it. They had quarrelled desperately the day before Sir Christopher's body was discovered."

Her daughter grew pale and rigid—the pallor and the rigidity of the lily. "You know I love Felix, mamma!" she faltered; "and you can ask me to desert him at such a moment! Besides, he is innocent, he can prove it; he was in Duchester the whole of that night."

"In our sphere of life, my dear Esther," was the reply, "a criminal accusation is as bad as a conviction. You understand my wishes; it is too hot to argue. Really August gets more and more trying, I must put on a tea-gown or melt Be a good girl, Esther, and when you next pass Mr. Dering, restrict yourself to a cool bow."

And with this heartless counsel Mrs. Carew's spare, elastic form and selfish countenance vanished from the drawing-room.

Esther crossed unsteadily to one of the French windows, released the hasp, stepped out into the garden, and traversed the lawn to a sheltered nook, shut in by tall bushes and boasting an ancient rustic bench, much battered and verdant with moss.

Here she flung herself down, buried her head upon her arms, and began to weep convulsively. A thrush in the neighbouring coppice sang on as if to mock her unhappiness. The sun was westering fast, and his yellow beams pierced a row of poplars to fall caressingly on her quivering figure.

The crisp sound of a horse's canter roused her from her abandonment of grief.

"That is Saladin!" she said, and, mounting the bench, peered over the hedge. It was, indeed, the chestnut, that, with Felix Dering in the saddle, was rapidly nearing the cross-roads.

Felix's glance, lingering affectionately upon the white villa, perceived the fair and fluttering curls of Esther Carew, and spurring to the way-side, he alighted. Tethering Saladin to the bough of a convenient poplar, he crushed through the hedge, and seized in a tender clasp the owner of the curls aforesaid.

"My darling," he murmured, kissing her fondly; "I did not dare to hope for a sight of you—what fairy whispered that I was riding by? But you have been shedding tears; how is this?"

Esther choked back a sob.

"It is nothing," she replied; "mamma hurt me and I came to have my cry out alone."

Felix Dering took her hands in his, his face was very grave yet gentle.

"Tell me," he desired; "how did Mrs. Carew wound you? I have a reason for asking. Was it anything to do with—with me?"

The girl shuddered.

"Yes," she admitted; "it was about Sir Christopher—

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and—and you. She said people in Wyresdale were talking of the quarrel you had had with your uncle before he—he was found."

"What else did she say?" inquired Felix sombrely.

"That—that you were being suspected," pursued Esther. "Oh, Felix, my darling, I can't repeat it, I can't. But I told her you had been at Duchester the whole of that night and you could prove yourself innocent. If I had not been able to say it I should have died."

Felix Dering winced and devoted himself to striking with his hunting-crop at the undergrowth of the hedge.

"And Mr. Hare called," added Esther, noticing with wonderment her lover's curious absorption. "I am sure it was he who told mamma what was being said in Wyresdale. She believes he has taken a fancy to me and insists that henceforth I must only bow to you. What shall we do?"

"Otto Hare has taken a fancy to you!" exclaimed Felix, aghast. "But your mother, she could not sell you to that man; it is incredible!"

"He is rich," rejoined Esther sadly; "mamma is very ambitious; she frightens me sometimes, as Mr. Hare did when I studied his face this afternoon. They will both have their own way, no matter what it costs. Felix, why did you ever love me? I shall bring you nothing but ill-luck; it was my fault you quarrelled with your uncle, my fault you are suspected of being——"

She did not finish the sentence, a call from the house had interrupted her.

"Miss Esther!" came a shrill summons.

"It is one of the maids," said Esther hastily; "mamma must want me. Good-bye, Felix, I love you—if all the world turned against you I would go on loving and believing in you."

Felix caught her to his breast and held her there for an instant. Then she broke from him and hurried off. There were tears upon Felix Dering's brown cheeks. Men who would have galloped dry-eyed with the Light Brigade will falter and grow weak as they look into the sacred deeps of a woman's love and self-sacrifice.

Brushing away the tell-tale moisture from his cheeks, Felix slipped through the hedge, mounted his horse and rode towards Dering House. The gallant animal between his knees knew, in the instinctive fashion of his race, that all was not well with his master. Once or twice he snorted and turned his intelligent muzzle, as if to inquire the reason for Felix Dering's slack hand and nerveless seat.

But Saladin got no answer and cantered on, till, in the fall of the July day, the chestnut came in sight of the ivied turrets and quaint facade of Dering House. Felix walked him to the stables and then, with a gloomy stride, entered the corridor that led to the great hall of the old mansion.

As he gained the lofty apartment from whose walls the portraits of gay and gallant Derings gazed at him amidst serried rows of bygone weapons and the antlers of historic stags, there hastened across it a beautiful boy, with an aristocratic profile, fragile limbs, and sunny locks. The resemblance between the twentieth-century child, in his velvet suit and lace collar, and the painted faces about the hall, marked him for a Dering.

"It *is* cousin Felix!" he cried in a clear treble, "I knew he would come back."

"Why should I not have come back, Brian?" demanded Felix Dering, lifting the lad to his shoulder.

Brian shook his head.

"I said you would," he assented, "but I heard Peters and Jane say that you mightn't. Cousin Felix, you haven't taken father from me, have you?"

A flood of passionate despair surged into the veins of Felix Dering. So rumour was already rife at Dering House!

"No, no, Brian," he said sorrowfully, "and if it would bring him to you again, I would go away myself with a glad heart."

He covered his face, the pang of the childish query had been too bitter.

Brian put his arms about the neck of his favourite play mate.

"Don't cry, cousin Felix," he begged; "we will go and look for father and fetch him home to mother. She has been crying all day."

A groan burst from the bosom of Felix Dering, and he set the boy down.

"Run and see the big round sun, Brian dear," interposed a quiet voice. Judith Garland had reached their side unnoticed. She returned Felix Dering's glance with an almost scornful scrutiny. The child, interested by the suggestion, went to a narrow pane that focussed the perspective of the avenue, at whose extremity the early tints of the sunset were suffusing the West.

"Your resolve is a wise one, Mr. Dering," said Judith Garland under her breath.

"What resolve?" asked Felix, miserably.

"To see it through," replied the other; "it is the only plan, especially for the guilty."

"Miss Garland!" exclaimed Felix Dering.

Judith smiled. "Trust me or not, as you choose," she said; "but first let me show you something."

She held out her palm; it contained half-a-dozen golden links, evidently the fragments of a chain. They were smeared with a brownish substance.

"That," she told him, "is a piece of your watch-guard, blood-stained, and picked up near the scene of Sir Christopher's death—the pattern is peculiar and easily identified. You are wearing the remainder, clumsily mended. One moment, I have not finished. You say you stopped in Duchester that night; it is false—you were seen near the cross-roads, about ten o'clock. Mr. Dering, your life is in my hands. Fortunately, I am your friend. Silence!" she added, as he parted his lips to respond to this amazing declaration; "we are no longer alone."

Her warning was correct; the bell of the hall-door had been rung loudly, and a footman was proceeding to answer it. The child Brian came to peep at the visitor.

As the footman opened, a stern, official figure stepped within—his blue and braided uniform, his smart cap and looped belt, declared him an inspector of police. Felix Dering staggered—was he dreaming, the prey of some hideous nightmare?

A caution sounded in his ear; Judith Garland was speaking to him.

"Don't look like that," she whispered; "pull yourself together!"

(To be continued next Tuesday.)

Don't Forget!

The design on the cover of the July

"ROYAL"

is Orange.

And the contents have never been excelled.

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Our Brilliant Failure.

By the late HENRY J. BYRON.

Author of "Our Boys," and many other famous Comedies.

READER, my name is Coodler. Having unbosomed myself to this extent, I need have no compunction in adding that I have a wife, a family of two interesting children, a snug business. I am not fat, I am only comfortable; my angles are pleasantly rounded, and I haven't a wrinkle on my chubby countenance. I am of a good temper—my wife once called it seraphic, but since my recent visit to the seaside I am afraid she has not been able to apply that extravagant term with the same consciousness of its correct significance as before we—but there, I mustn't anticipate.

Immersed in business from ten till five, it is not to be wondered at that I look forward to my annual holiday with, if I may be allowed the expression, my mental mouth watering. I am quite aware t at there is no such thing as a mental mouth, though why there should not be, when we have Shakespeare's authority for the existence of a "mind's eye" I can't say. But I never had a great opinion of poets. I have had one or two on my books before now, and they are not punctual in their payments—far from it. Well, as I was saying, when the weather begins to grow warm I find my place of business insupportable. I soon begin to grow warm myself, and a very small amount of sunshine and exertion overcomes me.

My wife is something of the same temperament, and she also longs annually for the seaside; for we don't consider a mere visit to the country an "out." We like fields, and hedges, and cows, and all that sort of thing, but we can have all that if we drive to Richmond or Epping Forest. What we want is a sniff of the briny, the bracing salt air, the clammy sticky atmosphere, that makes you feel uncomfortable and happy. I am vulgar in my tastes and delight in Margate. Some people say that they like to go to the seaside for quiet. Very good; let'em go. I prefer noise. I hate quiet.

I like niggers. I like Punch. I like the Jetty; and as for your Esplanades and dulness at your fashionable places, they are not in my way, and that's the honest truth.

Now, in her heart my wife delights in Margate too. Why, we went there when we were courting, and so the place has a sort of charm for both of us.

But when I suggested Margate this year, you should have seen the expression on my wife's face. It was grand. I knew what it meant. We've lately grown acquainted with Mrs. Mackintosh of —— Square, and a very genteel lady she is, and mighty grand notions she's imbued my wife with—horror of Margate being one of them.

"Mrs. Mackintosh tells me that Margate is unbearable this season; such a set of people!" said Mrs. Coodler to me when I mentioned my favourite haunt.

"Bother the people!" I replied; "I suppose you want Brighton with the sun in your eyes all day, and everybody dressed as if they were going into the parks."

"O, dear no!" said my wife, with a toss of the head; "it's not the season at Brighton yet."

Pretty changes had taken place in my wife's notions since Mrs. Mackintosh made her acquaintance. She never used to lay such stress on its being the season; in fact, she was rather partial to the earlier portion of the summer or the autumn, lodgings being cheaper at these times. Well, from Brighton I went through all the seaside places I could think of; but Mrs. Coodler had an objection to them all. I began at last to have serious fears that we should miss our seaside out altogether, for Mrs. Mackintosh had something to say against every place. My wife determined to go nowhere "out of season;" so really our choice was limited, as those places whose seasons fell late in the year were out of the question. I must take my six weeks in the summer, you see, and so the Isle of Thanet being shut against us (for Ramsgate shared the Mackintosh denunciation, and Broadstairs I kicked at myself), I began to feel uncomfortable. I at one time imagined that Mrs. Coodler was about to propose Boulogne, in order to come back with a foreign flavour; but she can't even go to Kew by the boat without being ill for the day; and as my opinion of Frenchmen—well, there, if you want to get my back up, mention 'em, that's all.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Mackintosh's mother fell very ill about this time, and the genteel friend had to go abroad, which was a great relief to me; for of all the women I ever knew, she—but there, I say nothing, she's in a foreign land, poor thing, and I can only pity her.

She had gone, it is true, but the genteel viper we had been nourishing in the family bosom had left its sting.

She had recommended Mudville. At present you are, of course, by no means impressed by the enormity of recommending Mudville. You don't know Mudville, never heard of Mudville, and will probably not find Mudville in the map. But wait. Hear more, and, I was going to add, avoid Mudville; but that advice would be superfluous; for a description of my visit to and my treat at that den of—b it there, again, you'll excuse me, I'm sure, when you have read a few pages further.

We were sitting at tea—a social meal in which I delight—nobody ever quarrels over tea; it's far beyond dinner in my opinion. We were seated at tea, Mrs. Coodler, myself and Grimley, an old friend. Grimley has a disagreeable knack of making himself universally unpleasant. Were it not for this, he would be a very nice fellow. He is what

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they call a rough diamond, and takes a pleasure in being rude; but as I say, it's his only drawback.

"Pass the buttered toast, Grimley," I said with a smile, for I was in a good temper, and was eating more than was prudent.

"Sooner keep you for a day than a week," replied the diamond, with his mouth full of muffin.

My wife threw a glance at Grimley that would have annihilated many men, but he didn't notice it.

"You go in for tea as if you were at the seaside," remarked Grimley, after a pause.

Disagreeable as was the remark, I was grateful to my friend for making it, for I had been longing to touch upon the subject of our summer tour, and hadn't known how to approach it. My wife brightened up, too, and left off looking black, a thing she always does when Grimley comes. I can't say why, but women are queer creatures, and Mrs. Coodler is no exception to the rule.

"Wish I was at the seaside!" I exclaimed, throwing a side-glance at my wife.

"Ah, indeed!" sighed Mrs. C.

"Why don't you go, then?" grunted our agreeable friend.

"That's just it," I replied hurriedly; "why don't we, eh, Jane?"

Jane didn't know, she was sure. For her part, she was ready to go to-morrow.

"Margate again, I suppose," sneered Grimley; he had a dreadful habit of sneering — all rough diamonds have.

"Margate indeed!" said my wife, with a toss of her head. "O dear, no! no more of your Margates;" then, after a pause, she added with most irritating emphasis, "nor your Ramsgates."

Now this was quite uncalled-for, as we had never stayed at Ramsgate, nor had I suggested that we should.

Grimley had always abused Margate. Now, however, he espoused the cause of that charming place and praised it beyond measure.

"Got too grand for Margate, I suppose, Coodler," he observed, taking another cup of tea—his third.

"No I haven't," I replied indignantly. "Give me Margate before all the watering-places in England, aye, or Wales either, if you come to that;" and I brushed the crumbs off my shirt-front with an indignant sweep of my hand, for I was (though seraphic) beginning to get a little put out.

"Margate's low," jerked out my wife with a scowl.

"Too many tradespeople, I suppose," sneered the rough diamond with a maddening grin.

"Well I won't go," said my wife, bringing down her fist (positively her fist) upon the table, and making the cups and saucers rattle again.

"Go abroad, ma'am," put in Grimley; "there's lots of pretty places in Switzerland."

The puppy! Because he had once been down the Rhine with Mr. Cook's party.

"Oh, sir," she blurted forth, making a sharp bob, "asking your parding, but is Mrs. Coodler to cook your mealses, or am I to do 'em. I merely wish to know, to save confusion for the future."

"Or America," he continued, with that horrible smile of his; "there's all sorts of goings on there now."

"O, rubbish!" I exclaimed, wishing to cover her ignorance, "none of your chaff, Grimley, for it's not required. I shall stay at home, unless it's settled very soon."

This frightened Mrs. Coodler, I can tell you. She turned pale. I saw the change distinctly—she turned *very* pale, and gasped out rather than spoke the following:

"Mrs. Mackintosh has told me of a delightful place on the—coast; a lovely spot, which is hardly known

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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yet; a wonderful place for children, and very, *very* genteel."

Reader, a word in your ear. Whenever you hear of a spot being described as a "wonderful place for children," avoid it. Remember you are not a child, and go somewhere else.

"And what's the name of it, my dear?" I asked.

"Mudville," replied my wife, with a side-look at Grimley, for she suspected he would make one of his vulgar, satirical remarks upon it.

"Well," he said, as I knew he would, "it sounds very pretty; quite inviting, I may say;" and he chuckled. He had a peculiar chuckle, something like the laugh of the hyæna, only more horrible.

I felt bound to rush to the rescue.

"I have no doubt that if Mrs. Mackintosh says it's nice, it is nice," I observed.

My wife gave me a grateful squeeze of the hand under the table, which brought the tears into my eyes; for she is a muscular woman, though short in stature.

"Has she ever been there, mum?" asked Grimley.

"No, she hasn't," replied Mrs. C. snappishly; "but she's friends who have, and I can trust her."

"Ah! can Coodler? that's the thing," said Grimley, with a twinkle in his evil eye.

This was a sly dig at my business, a subject on which I allow no man to joke. I drew myself up. I am not tall, but even my enemies admit that I am dignified. I drew myself up, and placing my thumbs in my waistcoat-holes, and my head back—my favourite position when desirous of being impressive—I thus addressed the satirical Grimley:

"Grimley, you are an old friend. As the poet says, 'We were boys together'; but I will not allow you, Grimley, to throw my shop in my teeth in the presence of the gentler sex. Don't do it again, Grimley, because I don't like it."

Then, turning to my wife, I said, with a sudden transition of manner from the imperially severe to the domestically gentle, "My love, we go to Mudville on Monday."

* * * * *

Going to Mudville, and getting there, are, I beg to state, two very different matters. The spirit may be willing, but the railway arrangements are worse than weak, the train putting you down at a very considerable distance from your destination.

We started—self and wife, my son Christopher, aged nine, my nurse Sarah Naggles (estimable, but warm-tempered), and my infant Roderick—from the station after breakfast, and the train put us down at Muffborough, and left us looking disconsolately at our boxes on the platform, and wondering whether we should get a fly, for we were some miles from Mudville, and we'd a good deal of luggage—we always have. We didn't wonder long. The Interesting Stranger soon ferreted out a fly, and a pretty specimen of a fly it was.

But first, touching the Interesting Stranger. He was a remarkably good-looking person, that is, for those who admire tall people—I don't; little and good's my motto. He had a slight tendency of blood to the nose, but, as my wife remarked, that might be constitutional. He had a heavy moustache, and parted his hair down the middle (an idiotic fashion), and he wore his seaside hat in a jaunty manner, and was altogether rollicking, and perhaps a trifle vagabondish-looking.

However, I never judge a man by his appearance, and I must admit he was very polite. He talked politics to me, for he got into the same carriage with us as we were starting, hoping he didn't inconvenience us, and not shying the least bit at the baby. He handed my wife the paper, he snapped his fingers at Roderick, and threw Christopher into convulsions by showing him some tricks with half-pence and imitating the man who came round for tickets. We were quite delighted to hear that he was going to Mudville; we were sure of one pleasant acquaintance there at all events.

I never saw my wife so pleased with anybody in my life, for she generally puts on a haughty way with strangers, which I have heard before to-day described as "queenly;" for she is chary of making acquaintances, and never forgets her family, who, between ourselves, were against her marrying me, especially her uncle Benjamin, who was a something or other under Government in foreign parts, and came home with a pension, and no liver to speak of.

Aristocratic in a small way was Mrs. C. before she condescended to smile on Christopher Coodler, I can tell you; and she had refused a half-pay officer, a young man high up in the Customs, and a distiller with a beautiful house at Brixton, previous to my popping the question.

So, considering all things, I was surprised to see how affable she was with the Interesting Stranger bound for Mudville. When the Interesting Stranger—who, to save trouble, I will, if you don't mind, denominate I. S.—found us ruefully eyeing our luggage at the station, he smilingly came to our assistance, and pounced upon a fly—like a spider. Then he helped to pile our luggage on to the roof, and bullied and cajoled the stupid driver into an almost wakeful condition; and so at last we found ourselves on the road to Mudville, and later on *at* that retired spot.

Mudville was one of those places that beggar description. It was small and melancholy; a wretched little—but there, I won't attempt it. We had been recommended to the apartments of Mrs Grogrum, and thither we drove.

Mrs Grogrum's front apartment looked out on the sea, and by an ingenious arrangement the builder had contrived that the back windows also gave a fine view of the ocean. Mrs Grogrum's house was built diagonally (I think that's the word) and it seemed to me to catch every wind that blew. It was plentifully supplied with windows too, and they rattled delightfully without ceasing.

Mrs. Grogrum was a fiery-faced female, with the most obtrusive black "front" I ever saw. I believe that "front" to have been made of horsehair, it was so shiny, stiff, and undeceptive. From a casual glance at the rubicund features of Mrs. G., I came to a hasty conclusion that she was addicted to ardent liquors. I was not surprised at this, as it is not altogether uncommon with brandy-and-watering-place landladies Pardon my humble joke, it shall be my last.

The instant we were settled (though we were a long time coming to terms with the one-eyed fly-driver, who was pertinacious, insolent, and apparently in a chronic state of inebriety), my wife went out to see what we could have to eat; for she is a good manager, is Mrs. Coodler, and I don't know a better judge of butchers' meat or fish. So she started off with the view to seeing the tradespeople, whilst I remained to settle myself.

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Settle myself, indeed! I hadn't got through the first half of my police reports (a part of the paper for which I have a weakness, I admit), when a loud tap was heard at my door, and before I had time to say come in, the form of Mrs. Grogrum blocked up the entrance, and stood quivering with some strong emotion.

I have before observed that I am beneath middle height—a good deal beneath it—I am also a peaceable man, prone to let things take their own way, and with a sublime respect for "peace and quiet." Consequently, I will admit that the quivering frame of Mrs. Grogrum flustered me, and I felt a sudden palpitation and a general trembling, which was not lost upon the landlady, whose quivering increased, and whose features became, if possible, more fiery, as she saw me quail beneath her luminous eye.

"O sir," she blurted forth, making a sharp bob, "asking your parding, but is Mrs. Coodler to cook your mealses, or am I to do 'em? I merely wish to know, to save confusion for the futur'."

I stared. It was the only thing I could do at the moment, and I did it.

"I repeat, sir, which is to do 'em?"

"Why, Mrs. Groggins——"

"GrogRUM, sir, if *you* please," was the lofty reply; for I'd called the woman by a wrong name in the agitation of the moment.

"Rum, by all means," I responded, with a touch of humour.

She looked daggers at me, but luckily, like the gentleman in the play, "used none."

"For Mrs. Coodler, she came into my kitchen and made remarks. Now, I'm missis in my own 'ouse, I do 'ope, and I am *not* a-going to have strange ladies a-coming and poking their noses, and a-prying into *my* kitching, and a-making remarks about my domestic. Mrs. Coodler comes into *my* kitching, she does, and requestes to look at my frying-pan, and speaks sharp to my domestic as doesn't bring the frying-pan instantaneous; me being missis in my own 'ouse, and not lodgers, nor never will as long as my name's Maria Grogrum. No. Imperent curiosity is what I won't stand, because it flusters me; and one as wishes to do her dooty to parties as takes her apartments, can't be flustered and do her dooty at at the same time. So what I says, sir, is if your good lady is a-going to cook, let's know at once, and the sooner we parts the best for all concerned; but if I'm to do the cooking, why then let Mrs. Coodler keep herself to herself! a-making her complaints when proper, of course, but not a-coming a-prying about in parties' kitchings and a-asking to see frying-pans."

I believe that if a violent fit of coughing had not taken Mrs. Grogrum, she would have been speaking still.

However, she coughed and curtseyed and quivered herself gradually out of the room; and mentally determining to look for fresh lodgings as soon as possible, I again attacked the great embezzlement case at Bow Street. But I was not to get beyond the third paragraph uninterrupted.

Again the door opened, and again a form quivered with passion on the mat.

This time it was not Mrs. Grogrum, but her servant of all work, Susan, or as she called herself "Shoozan."

Shoozan had a round rosy face, and round rosy elbows; she had red hair, and was freckled in reckless profusion. She could not, even by her most ardent admirers, have been considered a "neat-handed Phyllis." The number of grates she black-leaded weekly was evidently overwhelming, when compared with the ablutionary exercises she indulged in. In short, she was "grimy" to the last degree. Shoozan was bursting with some strong grievance; so I laid down my newspaper, and waited to hear her story.

"Please, sir," she gushed out after an inward struggle, "would you like to be called a nuzzy?"

Now I don't think I *should* like to be called a nuzzy. I have no notion what it means, but it sounds insolent. Before I could reply, however, the girl burst forth again, "And if she expects as I'm going to take the children's dinner up to the the top of the 'ouse, she's mistook."

Here Shoozan waggled her head about defiantly.

"My good girl," I said, for I always feel for servants in lodging-houses, poor wretches! but the kindly tone of my voice was too much for her; she burst into a vehement boo-hoo, and wept loudly. Beauty in tears is all rubbish. Those poets again! Beauty blubbering looks frightful, with a red nose and swollen eyes. Even the plain domestic looked plainer after wiping her eyes with her apron.

"It's very hard to be called names, a poor girl as never seen her parents."

Here she burst out again.

"There, go along," I said; "Sarah shall see after the children's dinner," and with a parting howl Shoozan retired.

What a time my wife seemed away! Again I attacked the embezzlement case, and this time I got as far as the magistrate's request if the prisoner had anything to say. But no further.

The door again burst open, and Sarah Naggles stood before me.

Sarah Naggles, than whom there is not a better nurse and a more abominable temper in Britain, stood there, shaking a thousand times more than Grogrum. In a tremulous point of view the landlady was a mere blancmange compared to Sarah, who was a down-right shivering mountain. For some seconds she could not speak; at length she did—loudly.

"Mr. Coodler, sir, I wish to leave your service at once, sir, on the spot." Here she selected a stain on the drugget to stand upon, thereby adding, as she evidently imagined, force to her remark.

"Good gracious, Sarah!"

"It's no use your trying to look dignified, sir. When Sarah Naggles says a thing, Sarah Naggles means it; and I'm off by the next conveyance."

I looked round helplessly; but my wife was out still, and until she came I could say nothing. Sarah could. She was apt to stick on a good many superfluous h's when excited, and she gave as her "hopinion that the landlady was honly a helderly hignoramus." She would have continued in the same strain, but, luckily, my youngest child, with intelligence beyond its years—or, rather, months—took advantage of her absence to fall off a high chair. This necessitated the presence of Sarah upstairs, and a temporary cessation of hostilities.

I was getting tired of being bullied, and I seized my hat with the intention of going out to find Mrs. Coodler. Chancing to look out of the window, I *saw* Mrs. Coodler. Mrs. Coodler was in conversation with the Interesting Stranger. Mrs. C. was smiling, the I. S. was smiling. Apparently Mrs. C. was enjoying herself, whilst I—but the contrast was too much, and I admit I was

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injudicious enough to dash my hat down over my brows. As it stuck tight, and wouldn't come up again, I immediately repented my rashness, and felt about for the door with a crab-like action, which was appropriate to the locality, but ungraceful.

Suddenly I found myself in somebody's arms. With a convulsive effort I raised my hat; terror had endowed me with increased strength, and I had a dreadful suspicion it might be Mrs. Grogrum.

It was not. It was the one-eyed fly-driver. The one-eyed fly-driver had been drinking, and swayed backwards and forwards, occasionally hiccuping. I asked him his business.

"Nor ain't going to," I replied clenchingly, if I may be allowed the expression.

"Werry good," said he; "then *my* mouth's sealed. I had a thing to say" (unintentionally quoting Mr. William Shakespeare, who *was* a poet rather), "but I won't. I'm not a-going to put my finger in no one else's pie."

If you could have seen his finger! I did, and have not eaten pie since.

He vanished. I turned my head away shudderingly, and when I recovered myself he had gone.

I was becoming rabid. I was also awfully hungry. My wife came in. I should have received her with an

A change as remarkable came over the countenance of the aggressive constable. He clapped his eye on the figure of the interesting stranger, and almost instantly clapped his professional handcuffs on the wrists of the same individual.

"Business," replied the man, looking round, as if undecided as to how he should continue, then jumping to an indisputable conclusion, "ain't pleasure. What is pleasure to some folks is pain to others."

The combination of annoyances was getting too much for me. I drew myself up, and assumed a frown.

"When I clapped my eyes," continued the driver.

"Your eye, sir," I replied, loftily. "Stick to facts."

"On you," said the one eyed incubus, not noticing my interruption, "I said, that's a gent as 'll stand a glass of summat. But you didn't now, did you?" and the fellow put his head on one side and leered hideously.

"Most decidedly I did *not*," I replied proudly.

"Nor ain't going to?" he continued.

air of sarcastic politeness (any friends of mine who read this will know the style of thing I mean—*my* playfully severe air, you know), but I was broken-spirited by recent trials.

"It's so annoying," she said, coming to the point at once; "there ain't a piece of meat to be got in the place; not even a chop to be procured for love or money before to-morrow."

"Sweet spot!" I murmured.

"And I've been to every shop in the place to get change for a five-pound note; but they say there isn't as much money in the town."

I smiled sardonically, but didn't speak.

"Then the fishmonger only comes over from Shell-

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borough on Mondays and Fridays, and to-day's Wednesday; and Mrs Grogrum says her fireplace isn't big enough to roast joints, so we must have all our meat baked; and there's no draught ale that's drinkable to be got here, because there's so little demand for it; and the poulterer's only got one very small rabbit, which is not at all good; and Mrs. Grogrum says she understood we found our own plate—she's only got two-pronged steel forks; and there's a dog next door but one, they tell me, that howls all night; and the windows in our room rattle so dreadfully, that we shan't get much sleep, I'm afraid; and there's no lock to the door; and the pillows are like dummies, they're so hard. And so you must put up with an egg and a slice of bacon for your tea."

The volubility of my wife, culminating in a decided *non sequitur*, was more than I could bear. I seized a chair in my agitation, and the back rails came off in my hands.

This calmed me. I propped it against the wall, with the determination of declaring I hadn't done it, and smiled once more.

"Mrs. Coodler," I observed (I never address my wife thus except under very peculiar circumstances)—"Mrs. Coodler, I have taken these apartments for a month, and we must try and make the best of them. Fortified by the cheering society of the Interesting Stranger, no doubt you will be able to bear up."

Mrs. Coodler coloured, and would have replied, but I waved her aside, and went out into the street to see the lions.

The lions! I was not long in seeing them all. There were the six bathing-machines, the "principal" hotel, the post-office, the library, and—nothing else. The library was an imposing edifice, that is to say, it was a dead take-in. There were no new books whatever, and I refused to be comforted by the "Adventures of a Guinea," neither could I be brought to properly appreciate the charms of "Pamela," so I went home again. I walked upstairs, and entering the apartment, found—no, reader, you're wrong for once—not the Interesting Stranger, but a policeman—a regular rural peeler. He eyed me with professional distrust and a calm smile. I swelled with indignation, and tried to awe him, but he was not to be awed.

"Good morning," said the policeman familiarly, "I presume——."

"You do, sir," I replied sharply, in my imperious manner. "You presume very considerably in entering a gentleman's apartments in this way, sir. Let me tell you, an Englishman's first floor is his castle, sir. What do you want?"

"You," replied the constable in a deep tone.

I was becoming accustomed to this sort of thing, and smiled.

"Your name is Dumpton," said the fellow.

"All right," I replied, "have it so, if you like, you must know best." I was tickled by the atrocity of the whole thing. "What's the charge? Burglary? Garroting? Murder? What is it?"

"You came from town by the half arter ten train?"

"I did."

"Good. A telegram informs me I'm to arrest a party of your description, at least, you're near enough to the description for me to arrest you. So, without more ado, come on."

My wife is an excellent woman, and at times her feelings get too many for her. She heard the final speech of the policeman, and with difficulty was dissuaded from flying at him. Such was also the case with Sarah Naggles, who has highly-developed nails, and (in consequence of blighted hopes) nourishes an abnormal hatred of "the force."

Between these two desperate women the one policeman of Mudville would, I am afraid, have come to the most unmitigated grief. He saw his peril, and produced a pair of handcuffs. I confess, the sight unmanned me, and I sank into a chair. I produced my card; I pointed to the direction on my boxes; I threatened to write to the *Times*; I explained how ridiculous it would be in a felon travelling about with a family; I pleaded and stormed alternately, but to no object.

The policeman had received his instructions, had been directed to us by the malevolent one-eyed fly driver, had executed his orders, and was deaf to reason, blind to a bribe, and generally stupid and unswervingly upright.

Mrs. Grogrum coming in suddenly upon the scene did not improve the tone of the meeting, as may be supposed.

She had settled that we "was no good" the instant Mrs. C. had made rude remarks about her frying-pan, "a article as a *reel* lady would despise to worrit herself about." And as for the sylph in the black stockings, Shoozan, she had long ago learnt to place the blindest confidence in the Mudville policeman, who was the model of manly beauty in the eyes of the neighbouring maidservants.

We were at our wit's end. My wife was frantic, the nurse furious, the children fractious. Wrapped in his panoply of authority and pig-headedness, the policeman alone was calm.

To us (at this juncture) entered blithely the Interesting Stranger. A smile was on his lip, a tear was *not* in his eye.

I was about to appeal to him to clear up the mystery, when I observed a remarkable change come over his features. At the same time a change as remarkable came over the countenance of the aggressive constable. He clapped his eye on the figure of the Interesting Stranger, and almost instantly clapped his professional handcuffs on the wrists of the same individual.

The Interesting Stranger answered to the description in the telegram in every particular; and to this day I cannot comprehend the reason for arresting me, for we are not in the least alike. The I. S. was tall; I am—well, under the middle height. The I. S. was good-looking (at least Mrs. Coodler declares so, spite of everything; and he was described by the police reporter as a "person of fashionable appearance"), and I am, I admit, not striking to look at, though dignified for a short person. The I. S. was not dressed like me either; so altogether it was a muddle at Mudville, and I might have kicked up a great row about it.

Did I stop to have any arguments, to receive the grovelling apologies of Mrs. Grogrum, the trembling beseechings of the obtuse policeman, the solemn assurances of attention and cleanliness from Shoozan, the universal sympathy of the excited populace—did I wait for all this?

Did I?

Did I fetch the one-eyed fly-driver from his favourite haunt, and bundle self and family back to town that afternoon?

Didn't I!

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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THE ASSIZE UNDER THE CROSS.

Some years ago I spent a summer holiday in Hungary, in a part of that country little frequented by tourists—or by anyone else, for that matter. I am partial to those spots and districts, and find rest and pleasure in them.

One afternoon I reached the little village of Panigstein and engaged, after some trouble, a bed for the coming night in the somewhat unprepossessing erection known as an inn. Most of us are taught in our school days not to judge by appearances, and the interior proved more inviting than the outside. I had heard of this village and a strange custom connected with an ancient cross there, and I wished to see this relic of the old days of martyrdom which still had such a power over the villagers.

It was not until the following morning, however, that I made my way to the stone cross. I was up early and thoroughly enjoyed the walk to the edge of the rugged heath where stood the Gothic chapel with the cross some few yards in front of it. A lovely spot! A beautiful landscape whichever way your eyes wandered; a spirit of peace all around you; a spot calculated to inspire love of the good and shame for the wrong that one might have committed. An appropriate place for holding an assize.

An unwritten law, or tradition, had ordained that once in every nineteen years the judge on circuit should sit in judgment on wrong-doers under the cross, and the strange ceremonial had an indescribable fascination for the inhabitants of the district for miles. Early on the morning of the great day the crier went through the village for the purpose of summoning the people to attend the assize, and every man, woman and child of Panigstein gathered in front of the cross at the appointed hour; absence, unless warranted by illness, was regarded as a sign that the conscience of the absentee was not clear.

That was the subject of my meditations as I surveyed the moss-grown, roughly-hewn cross, and I wondered if my host, or one of those to whom I had spoken during my short stay, could tell of any unwonted incident connected with the open-air assize. I was thinking deeply of this when I awoke to the fact that I had unconsciously begun the return journey, and I swung myself on my heels to take another look at the cross. I opened my eyes more widely in surprise when I observed the figure of a woman, dressed in mourning, standing before it—stand for a second and then sink on her knees in an attitude of prayer.

I felt like an intruder and walked away more rapidly; but I was curious and wanted to know all about it, just as a child desires to have all the details of some small happening affecting or interesting itself. I had scarcely entered the inn before I interrogated the landlord; he looked serious for a moment, then remarked that it was the "anniversary of the affair" and volunteered to tell me the story. I will give it in more coherent form than he, for his narrative was interlarded with remarks foreign to the subject.

Luiza Polkai was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer of Panigstein, who had been burgomaster for three years in succession. The fact that she was pretty as well as heiress to what was regarded as a fortune in that little community, was sufficient to make all the young men anxious to take her to wife. Luiza showed no special preference, but availed herself of the attentions, and accepted the presents of flowers, of any one of her admirers as the fancy took her. After a time, one of the young fellows, Mor Givaur, resolved on the bold course of taking her by storm, as it were, and audaciously declared to her that he knew she loved him and that he intended to ask her father for permission to marry her.

This course of action amused and pleased the girl; she felt that this young fellow must indeed be madly in love with her to dare so much and she experienced a sensation of admiration that was certainly akin to love.

She neither gave her consent to his approaching her father on the subject nor did she bid him to do so; hence, he took silence for consent and had an interview with the burgomaster.

But Luiza's father, a choleric man, was angry when he discovered that Mor had come without his daughter's consent; he did not see things in the same way as the young man, and characterised the step as an insult to his child and himself. Further, he disliked Mor Givaur—although he did not say so at the time, and he objected to him as a son-in-law.

Mor went straight to Luiza and told her briefly that the interview had not been quite satisfactory, but that he considered her as belonging to him, and would again see her father in a few days. Luiza began to think that this was the kind of man who would make her a good husband; she liked his masterful ways; so she smiled and wished him, half in jest and half in earnest, success in his undertaking, but she would not permit the caress which he desired. The burgomaster thought it best not to allude to the interview, and so a week passed.

Then Mor tried the old man again, and this time there was a quarrel. Polkai raked up an old grievance of his against the young man's father; Mor became hot—his temper was of the quick, violent kind that is soon spent—and high words followed. All the village learnt about it bit by bit, and it was the one, the all-absorbing topic of conversation until Burgomaster Polkai was found murdered on the high road just outside Panigstein late one night by a party of searchers who were trying to ascertain the reason of his non-arrival home from the market town.

Suspicion fell on Mor Givaur, but the fact that Polkai had been robbed was rather in Mor's favour. It gave colour to the contention of Givaur and his friends that the crime was the work of thieves. Mor was able to prove that he was two miles away from the scene of the murder up till an hour before the time when the murder was probably committed and that he then left some friends and took a direction that would lead him so far from the spot as to make it impossible for him to get

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there and commit the crime within the specified time.

On the whole, there was no evidence of any value against anyone, and the general opinion prevailed that the murder had been perpetrated by robbers.

Efforts to track the robbers failed entirely and no clue whatever could be obtained concerning the perpetrator or perpetrators of the crime; the interest in the case died away and people ceased to think about it.

But Luiza was determined not to let the matter drop so easily; she had offered a reward and had taken the keenest interest in all that had happened. Her natural grief had early given place to a vehement desire for revenge on the one who had deprived her of a loving parent, and she had formed a resolve to devote the rest of her life and her money to the task of bringing the murderer to justice or punishing him herself. She lived in the farmhouse, leaving the work of cultivation to the supervision of a man, one Patzki, who had acted as a kind of steward to her father.

Mor Givaur refrained from pressing his suit for nearly a year, contenting himself with an occasional visit; but he felt sure of success when the period of mourning was over, and his former rivals left him a free field, believing they had no chance. Luiza received him in a manner that encouraged him although it was not demonstrative or even indicative of great affection. Mor accepted this as natural in the circumstances, and had no suspicion of the real facts.

Luiza, after having considered all the details that had reached her, had formed the opinion that the man who was attempting to woo her was responsible for her father's death—he had either killed the old burgomaster himself or had caused him to be killed. She had discovered that her father was cognisant of a certain dark passage in the life of Givaur's father—something that had happened when they were both quite lads and lived elsewhere—and the burgomaster had threatened to reveal this passage if Givaur persisted in his suit; this had not been made known at the time of the investigation of the murder; Luiza had gained the information piece by piece, connecting odd words and phrases of Givaur himself with other evidence and, above all, with a paper found among her father's effects. She was convinced of the accuracy of her opinion, but she must get evidence to bring him within the law in such a manner that he could not escape.

So she at length began to mildly encourage his suit; her desire for revenge triumphed over her loathing of the heartlessness and duplicity of a man who was paying court to the daughter of the one he killed. She hoped to entrap him when he should be suspecting nothing and thus make him encompass his own destruction. As she had kept to herself her vow to avenge her father, Mor would be far more likely to fall into the snare.

But try as she might, she could get no nearer. Another six months passed, and she now threw herself more into her task and showed her affection openly; she encouraged him to the utmost that she dared, for she declined to give him a decisive answer and fix a date for their union. People said Luiza was playing with the young man, and Givaur, on one occasion reproached her for her cruelty—and at once craved her pardon.

Luiza began to despair of accomplishing her task and cast about her for some other method. Suddenly she remembered the assize under the cross, which would take place in three months. She knew quite well that Mor Givaur was as superstitious as most of the inhabitants and her mind was made up.

"I want you to help me at the assize," she said to the woman who acted as maid-of-all-work to her. "I will bring my father's murderer to his just fate." And she explained her plan.

"I dare not do it!" gasped the affrighted woman. "Suppose——"

"We suppose nothing," returned Luiza calmly. "You will do as I bid you, and if you fail, then the blood of my father will be upon your head!"

Between the two alternatives the poor woman had no will of her own; she must either risk offending the judge or bring a dreadful something upon herself in another form. She was powerless to do anything but yield to Luiza.

Luiza Polkai laid her plan for the great day; she believed that she was acting as the instrument of Heaven, for Luiza was imbued with the popular awe of the spot and the occasion.

The day of the assize arrived and the crier summoned all to attend. The inhabitants gathered in front of the cross; Mor Givaur was there, looking for his sweetheart, whom he failed to see.

"Where is your mistress?" he inquired of Maria.

"She is not well, but she will try to be here," responded the woman in a shaky voice. "She must try to come, because the murderer of her father——"

Maria was interrupted by a movement that announced the arrival of the judge; Givaur slipped back to the side of a friend and all watched and waited.

The judge took up his position with due solemnity; he held a paper that usually contained the names of the accused, but was this time blank.

After a few formal words intended as an opening speech, he continued:

"Our meeting to-day at this historic and hallowed spot will be of short duration, as there has been no crime during the past two years, when prisoners were tried at the usual court. I must congratulate——"

Then an extraordinary thing occurred; the judge was interrupted. It was Maria's voice that cut short his congratulations; her acquaintances marvelled that she had the courage.

"My mistress' father was murdered less than two years ago. Let the murderer of Burgomaster Polkai be tried!"

The judge conferred hastily with the new burgomaster and gleamed some details; then he spoke:

"My good woman, much as I deplore the crime, I can do nothing. It must be plain to you that we cannot try the culprit if he is not here." Under his breath he added: "She must be mad!"

"He is here!" said Maria, maintaining control of her voice by a great effort. Her eyes were looking vacantly into space, as though some dread power was forcing her to act. "His name is Mor Givaur!"

The accused man uttered a cry of surprise with just a trace of fear in it: his cheeks paled and he looked from Maria to the judge in mute inquiry. Patzki, who was near Maria, fell back with a cry; he had fixed his eyes on her at her first words and had been unable to turn them away. "She's mad," he muttered hoarsely, and his friends pitied him, for it was an understood thing that they were to be married shortly.

Another hasty conference and the judge understood what course to adopt; it would be a good opportunity to remove the stigma from the young fellow.

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"You have made an accusation," observed the judge gravely. "We will hear the witnesses. I know the facts of the case. Have you any witness who can actually prove Mor Givaur to be the murderer?"

Maria's eyes wandered to the back of the crowd; she knew the part that Luiza expected her to play. The success of the plot depended on the superstition of the villagers, and it was her duty to excite them—including the culprit—to such a pitch that the last-mentioned would betray himself.

"Yes!" said Maria solemnly. "A witness whom none can contradict! The spirit of Burgomaster Polkai! See!" she almost shrieked, pointing to the back of the crowd, and all present involuntarily turned. "Here he comes, in the very blue coat, in the very hat—dressed exactly as he was that night!"

A thrill of horror went through them all as they saw the figure of Polkai coming toward them; they fell back to let it pass on its way to the cross, to face and accuse Mor Givaur. In spite of his superior mental calibre, the judge could not restrain a shiver.

The figure moved slowly onwards, but there was no abject cry, no betraying sign, from Givaur. The eyes of the figure seemed to blaze with avenging wrath. The people stood transfixed, waiting.

Suddenly a piercing cry—a horrible scream that seemed to change their blood to ice, drew the attention of the assembled villagers to another person than Mor Givaur and caused the figure to stop abruptly. The cry came from Patzki, near to whom the apparition had just passed; he held his hands before his face, as if to ward off a blow.

"Mercy! Mercy!" he shrieked "I see the blood, it is on my hands now! It will never come out, it stains too deeply! Mercy!" And he fell to the ground in a fit.

"It was not Mor Givaur, and I have wronged him all this time," came in a despairing voice from the apparition.

Luiza, for it was Polkai's daughter, walked unsteadily to the cross, the judge stepping aside, fell on her knees and prayed.

* * * * *

Patkzi confessed his guilt, but he died of heart disease before he could be tried. He had been, secretly defrauding his master for a long time, and while he was away for two days Polkai had confirmed a growing suspicion. The two men met on the fatal night and Polkai had there and then accused Patzki, threatening to have him arrested on the morrow. Patzki had committed the crime in a fit of fear and anger.

"I tried to make up for it by being honest in my dealings with my mistress," was his last remark.

Luiza Polkai sold her farm and went from the village. Mor Givaur forgave her for her cruel opinion and deceit, and would have married her; but she could not forgive herself and left him, although everyone believed she loved him. Every anniversary of her father's death sees her at the cross, where she mourns a lost parent and a lost love; but she speaks to no one and nobody attempts to speak to her.

Mor Givaur left the village, too, and his whereabouts was never known.

Maria received a handsome present from her mistress and went to live in another part of the country, where she married.

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The Man with the White Neckcloth.

MONTEVARO—or "Monte" as he was more generally called—the little grimy, garlic-loving foreign sailor, was guilty of a slight oversight in respect to latitude and longitude when he got into a row with a night watchman down at the docks.

In the heat of the moment, and under the impression no doubt that his foot was on his native soil—the island of Cuba—he proceeded to settle the dispute after the manners and customs of his country, namely, by putting a knife into his opponent. For which indiscretion the said Monte was hustled into the dock at the Old Bailey in as short a space as the formalities of the law would allow.

It was a commonplace and vulgar little crime, and, for my part, my attention was drawn to it solely by the fact that I happened to be present in court when the little sailorman was put on trial.

Turning to look at him, as he stood in the dock, I was struck by one rather singular circumstance. Though it was the height of summer, and the weather was warm enough in all conscience, he was muffled to the chin in a heavy crimson scarf, which he appeared very anxious to keep in its proper place. From time to time I noticed that he raised his hand in a somewhat nervous, fidgety manner, as if it was more on his mind than the charge of inflicting "grevious bodily harm," which he seemed to take airily enough.

The case was going dead against him, without even an extenuating circumstance having been brought to light so far, and it looked as if he would come in for a pretty stiff sentence. But Monte had a surprise card up his sleeve.

In order to rebut the suggestions of the Crown, which made him out to be a very desperate and blood-thirsty little rascal, he called a certain Mr. Montagu Cardwell, whose address was given as a fashionable West-End hotel.

There was quite a subdued stir in court when, in answer to the usher's call, a spruce, dapper, soldierly little man, with the air and bearing of a retired general, stepped into the witness-box and bowed gravely to the judge.

In a very superior tone and manner he testified that during a lengthy residence in Cuba he had been brought into contact with this man Montevaro, who was, according to Mr. Montagu Cardwell, a most peaceable law-abiding, unoffending and altogether much-maligned individual. It was true, Mr Cardwell went on to explain, that the prisoner was subject to violent outbursts of passion, which were to be attributed mainly, if not entirely, to the fact that he had at one time received a severe injury to the head. When provoked the little sailor could scarcely be held responsible for his actions.

Having said all that he could for the accused, and turned the tide very much in his favour, Mr. Montagu Cardwell bowed to the judge again and stepped down.

As he descended the steps of the witness-box, his head slightly lowered, I noticed that he flashed one quick intelligent look at the man in the dock, which was so covert and stealthy that few besides myself could have observed it. Monte caught it, though, and showed all his white teeth in a satisfied grin.

That look struck me as being remarkably odd, and instantly set me thinking. It seemed to point to the fact that there was some connection, some secret tie, between this Mr. Cardwell and the little sailor, though it was scarcely possible to imagine how two such persons could be associated in any way. What league or confederacy was wide enough to embrace a man who made his home at a fashionable West-End hotel and one who was compelled to spend his days in the stuffy evil-smelling forecastle of a foreign barque?

My thoughts were immediately switched off upon this side-track. My whole interest in the trial had fizzled out. I did not even wait to learn the sentence meted out to Monte. Seeing that Mr Montagu Cardwell had left the court, I rose at once and slipped out after him.

Pushing my way through the crowd of witnesses and policemen that blocked the passage and hall, I found him poised on the step at the entrance, glancing up and down the street as if undecided which way to take. As I brushed past him on my way out, one peculiarity in his style of dress, which I had already noticed as he stood in the witness-box, caught my eye again. Inside his collar, folded neatly round the throat, and reaching almost to the chin, was a white neckcloth of the finest silk. Itmay have been merely a fashion he had picked up abroad of course; but taken in conjunction with the way in which Montevaro sought to conceal his throat, the fact struck me as somewhat singular, to say the least of it.

I turned off to the right, and walked slowly in the direction of Holborn. Though I did not venture to glance back, I was very curious to know whether the little man was still on the step, or if he had disappeared. I was as keen upon keeping him in sight as if I had been told off specially to shadow him.

Just as I reached the corner there was a quick firm

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step behind me, and the next moment Cardwell swung past. With the brisk air of a man who wasn't given to wasting his time he turned into Holborn and walked quickly toward the viaduct. I followed at some little distance, keeping a watchful eye upon him.

He never paused, or even slackened his pace, until he had got well past Chancery Lane, when he swung into one of the fashionable restaurants in that quarter. I hung back for a minute or two, and then strolled in after him. He was standing in the tessellated hall, his back towards me, intent upon studying some theatrical poster. I passed on, made my way to the smoking-room, ordered whiskey and a cigar, and waited.

At this hour of the day—it was scarcely noon yet—the smoking-room was practically deserted. There were not more than half-a-dozen occupants in all, and for the most part they seemed to be business people who had dropped in for a few minutes in passing. One man alone caught and riveted my attention.

He was standing near one of the little marble-topped tables, in the act of lighting a cigar, so that I had a good opportunity of observing him without appearing in any way obtrusive.

A man of magnificent physique, in the prime of life too, he was without exception one of the finest specimens of the human race I have ever seen. His swarthy complexion, dark eyes, and strong, regular features, showed that he had Spanish blood in his veins, wherever he hailed from. On looking at him more closely, a peculiar fulness in the red lips, and certain other characteristics, left little doubt upon my mind that he was a Creole.

Having got his cigar well under way he sank into a deep armchair with a sigh of placid contentment, tilted his chin up, and spouted a jet of smoke high into the air.

I was so deeply occupied in watching this interesting stranger that I quite lost sight of the object I had in view when I turned in here. Just at that moment, however, I was startled by hearing a smothered exclamation close behind me, which I took to have some reference to myself. My head went round over my shoulder with a jerk; and there, standing near the door, within a yard or two of me, I beheld Mr. Montague Cardwell.

But it was not upon me that his eyes were fixed. His gaze travelled past me and had fastened upon the stranger, whose back was partly towards him, with an expression of such vindictive triumph that I involuntarily glanced at the Creole, half expecting to see him start round every instant under the magnetic power of that deadly look riveted upon him.

But no; he seemed blissfully unconscious of the fact that anyone had entered the room, or that he was in such close proximity to a man who appeared to regard him with mortal enmity.

For a few brief seconds Cardwell stood there, striving to get his unruly passions well in hand, as it seemed. Then, with a smile which it was anything but pleasant to behold, he moved forward softly and tapped the other lightly on the shoulder.

Good Heavens! Never in my life did I witness anything like the ghastly, shuddering fear that leaped into the Creole's eyes as he turned his head and saw who was standing behind him. The very sight of that cool, dapper little man, whom, if it was merely a case of brute strength, he could have crushed the life out of with the greatest ease, seemed to melt his heart within him. He made one or two feeble efforts to rise from his seat, but collapsed into it again the next second.

At last he succeeded in getting upon his feet, a sickly greyness showing through the tan of his face, his full lips hanging loose. The cigar had fallen from his nerveless fingers, and lay reeking on the floor at his feet, a mute testimony to the shock which had stricken him.

For some seconds they stood thus, those two men, staring at each other in that grimly tragic manner, and utterly oblivious apparently to the presence of anyone else.

Cardwell was the first to break silence.

"Come out," he said, with a motion of his head towards the door.

The Creole did not move.

"Do you hear?" went on his companion. "Come out at once, or——"

He made a movement as if to leave the room, which seemed to cow the other into instant submission. With a lurch he hastened to join the little man, who took him by the arm and led him away.

As they passed through the door, I waited a moment or two, and then hurried out after them. I was just in time to see them get into a hansom together and drive off in the direction of Oxford Street.

* * * * *

Two days later that magnificent-looking Creole, whom I had last seen in the full vigour of health and strength, was found hanging, a stiffened corpse, in an empty house out at Fulham. He had been dead, the doctors declared, for ten or twelve hours before the body was discovered.

To the police it was clearly a case of suicide. But I knew better. Though I told them of the strange encounter I had witnessed between the dead man and Montagu Cardwell, they pooh-poohed the idea of foul play. I believe in the end they endeavoured to trace Cardwell, but he was not to be found.

As nothing transpired in the course of the next few weeks to throw the smallest light upon this singular affair, the case was added to the long list of unsolved London mysteries.

* * * * *

I think it was somewhere about the middle of the October following that I climbed the steps of a Kensington 'bus at Charing Cross one evening, just as it was growing dusk. There were a good many people on top, and I was compelled to take a seat beside a stout, heavy man, whose face was buried in a newspaper.

I paid little attention to my burly neighbour at first but gradually it began to dawn upon me that he must have remarkably keen eyesight if he could decipher print in such a light as this.

I glanced round at him in some surprise, and as I did so I became aware of a most astonishing and bewildering fact. He was holding the paper upside down!

Leaning back in the seat I tried to get a glimpse at his face, and saw that he was using the paper merely as a screen, behind which to conceal his features. He seemed to be in a nervous panic lest he should be seen and recognised.

When the 'bus pulled up at Piccadilly Circus I happened to be looking the other way, thinking of something else at the moment.

A quick gasp beside me, and a sound as if the paper was crumpled up suddenly, brought my head round in an instant, and to my surprise, I saw that my

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His hand went like a flash to his hip pocket, but I was too quick for him. Without the smallest compunction I fired point blank at him.

stout friend was staring down over the side as if there was something which positively fascinated him.

Half rising from the seat I craned my neck over his shoulder, and very nearly collapsed when I noticed upon whom his eyes were fixed.

Down there on the pavement, in the midst of the jostling throng, and looking straight up at us, was Montagu Cardwell!

For a second or two he regarded the stranger with much the same deadly look as he had fastened upon the Creole; then swung round upon his heel and disappeared quickly through the crowd.

The stout man dropped back in his seat like a dead weight, his eyes almost starting from his head, his trembling fingers clawing at his collar as if it was choking him.

"I fear you are unwell," I said, turning to him with some concern, for I really thought that he might go off into a fit at any moment.

His only answer was a groan.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" I went on, sincerely anxious to be of some service to him.

"I thank you," he returned. "Nothing."

He made an effort to pull himself together, and succeeded so far that he was able to enter into a desultory conversation. But I could see by the way he swayed to and fro in his seat, and the deep, groaning sighs which came from him, that he was still inwardly on the rack, and felt an uncomfortable sense of sitting next to a man with acute mental suffering.

When the 'bus stopped opposite the station in High Street, Kensington, I turned to my new friend, who was deeply absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts at the moment.

"I am getting down here," I remarked.

"Eh?" he said, starting from his reverie. "So will I. I'll walk the rest of the way. It will do me good."

On reaching the pavement he looked around him in a dull, vacant manner, apparently quite at sea as to his whereabouts.

"Will you allow me to offer you a glass of wine before you go?" I said, for I was reluctant to leave him in such a helpless condition.

He clutched eagerly at the proposal. I think he was glad of any excuse to remain in my company a little longer. We entered a comfortable saloon bar close by and seated ourselves on either side of one of the little round tables. I ordered the refreshments, and then fell to studying my stout friend.

He was evidently a man who had knocked about the world a good deal, and there were plenty of indications that his life had been a stormy and eventful one. But though he may have been able to hold his own right enough in times past, there was little backbone in him now.

His spirit had evidently been crushed and broken. He gave me the impression of one who was pursued by some haunting phantom, from which he strove in vain to escape.

A sudden impulse seized upon me as we sat there together, and I leaned forward across the table.

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"Tell me," I said, looking straight at him, "do you happen to know a man named Montagu Cardwell?"

He had raised his glass to his lips, but as I put the question he set it back very deliberately on the table and rose slowly to his feet. In his eyes there was such a fixed look of horror and consternation that I was instantly smitten with remorse.

Then, before I had time to stammer out an apology, he lurched forward suddenly and pitched head-foremost across the marble slab between us, sending the glasses flying to the ground with a crash.

There was a hubbub and a scene, of course, and all those in the bar came buzzing around us. As for me, I was so shocked by the astounding effect of my rash question that I was able to render little assistance.

I could only stand by and look on helplessly while the others strove to revive my unfortunate companion.

When he came round at last he was in such a state of collapse that I saw it would be necessary for me to convey him home. We got him into a hansom and I hastened to take my place at his side. In answer to my inquiry he mumbled an address at Hammersmith, to which I ordered the cabman to drive.

The house, I found, consisted of a small shop in a rather dingy thoroughfare down near the river, with a side entrance giving access to the rooms above. After fumbling in his pockets for some little time my companion produced a latchkey, which he silently handed to me. I opened the side door, and we entered a dark, narrow passage, where, by dint of striking several matches, I discovered a candle on a wall-bracket. Having lighted it, I assisted the stout man upstairs.

Judging by appearances he evidently lived here quite alone. In a bare front room off the landing, into which he tottered, I found the remains of his breakfast still on the table. I sat down, determined to keep him company for an hour or so.

At first he seemed to regard me with a sort of shrinking suspicion, but when I explained to him that I knew nothing of this Montagu Cardwell, or had any connection with him whatever, his face cleared. I went on to say that I had first seen the man in the witness-box at the Old Bailey, and that my question had been prompted solely by my having recognised him again in Piccadilly a short time back. I made no reference to his meeting with the Creole, however.

The stout man, who informed me that his name was Weaver, appeared vastly relieved as I finished. Indeed, he seemed to have conceived a sudden friendship for me and sought to detain me by every means in his power, as if he felt a certain sense of security in my presence.

When I rose to depart he looked up at me with something approaching fear in his eyes.

"You're not going?" he asked quickly.

"I'm afraid I must," I answered. "But I'll come back again to-morrow evening if you like."

"Do," he said, heartily. "Come late—about eleven. Here, take the latchkey," he went on, pushing it across the table towards me. "I've got another one somewhere and can do without it. Let yourself in quietly; and—and—listen first. If you hear a noise——" He broke off abruptly, shivered a little, and covered his face with his great, fleshy hand. And thus I left him.

Before starting out on the following evening I took the precaution of shoving a trusty little six-shooter into my hip pocket, for, considering all things, I thought it just as well to go "heeled" as the Yankees say.

On reaching the house, which seemed to be in total darkness, I let myself in without a sound. Then, acting upon Weaver's advice, I stood for a moment in the narrow passage, listening intently.

Did I hear a noise? I did! Though I couldn't make out exactly what it was, a vague sense of alarm seized upon me and I hastily slipped the revolver from my pocket.

It seemed to me as if there was a confused shuffling somewhere overhead, which was followed by a strange, flopping sort of sound, as if someone was floundering about on the bare floor. I felt convinced there was villainy on foot, though what the nature of it was I couldn't imagine.

With the revolver ready in my hand I crept cautiously up the stairs, and reached the landing in safety. The sounds came from a back room, and as I stole towards the door on tiptoe I heard something that seemed to make my blood run cold. It was like a smothered bellow of fear, as if someone was vainly attempting to shriek for help.

Without a moment's hesitation I flung open the door and dashed into the room. Good Heavens! Never to my dying day will I forget the appalling sight that met my gaze!

There, lying on the bare floor, his huge, ungainly body swathed in rope, a handkerchief bound tightly over his mouth, and his eyes starting from their sockets, was the unfortunate Weaver. A rope was dangling from a pulley which had been attached to a hook in the ceiling, and two men were down on their knees beside the wretched victim, doing their best to get the noose at the end over his head. Great God! he was about to suffer the same fate as the Creole. These men had come here for the express purpose of hanging him!

All this I took in at a glance, but scarcely had I done so than the man nearest me sprang to his feet with a fierce oath. His hand went like a flash towards his hip pocket, but I was too quick for him. Without the smallest compunction I fired point blank at him and dropped him in his tracks. At the same instant the second man sprang across the prostrate body, and was upon me before I had time to turn round. He was none other than Montagu Cardwell himself!

For the next couple of minutes we had a fairly hot time of it, Cardwell making desperate efforts to get hold of the revolver. But though wiry enough, and full of fight too, he was of no great account in a close scrimmage of this kind. And when he saw, as he soon did, that he was likely to get the worst of it, he promptly wrenched himself free, darted through the open door, and went clattering off down the stairs.

The instant he was gone I rushed to the assistance of the unfortunate Weaver and very soon had him on his feet again. Then, as I noticed that the fellow whom I had winged, who did not appear to be very badly hurt, was beginning to stir, I flew downstairs, summoned a policeman, and gave the rascal into his charge.

* * * * *

It was fully a week before poor Weaver, whose nerves had been scattered by the shock, was in a condition to be questioned regarding this dastardly attempt upon his life. I visited him frequently, and one morning, finding him more cheerful than usual, I ventured to relate the extraordinary scene I had witnessed in the

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smoking-room of a Holborn restaurant, adding that the Creole was afterwards found hanging in an empty house sat Fulham.

"Ah," said my companion, "I knew that poor fellow well. Alvarez was his name, and he was an old comrade of mine. I read all about the thing in the newspapers at the time, though I daren't come forward to denounce his murderers. It would have been as much as my own life was worth."

"But what does it all mean?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," he said, as if there was now no further need for concealment. "You must know that though I am English by birth, most of my life has been spent out in Cuba, where I and a few others held certain concessions from the Spanish government. This Montagu Cardwell was one of those associated with me; Alvarez another.

"Though Cardwell was always a difficult man to get on with, things went well enough until the insurrection broke out. That soon burst us up, for we were upon what was called the neutral territory, which was ravaged by each side in succession, and in a very short time was little better than a howling wilderness.

"Cardwell and a few others went off to join the rebels; the rest of us, including Alvarez and myself, stood by the government, and were enrolled in a body of irregulars that fought for Spain.

"Do you know what that insurrection in Cuba was like in those early days? Hell let loose! No quarter was shown on either side. If any of the rebels were captured, they were strung up straight away to the nearest tree, and, of course, the opposite party retaliated in the same manner.

"As ill-luck would have it, the company to which I belonged captured Cardwell and three or four others. Though he never knew it—indeed, he always supposed the exact opposite to the case—I pleaded hard for his life. But it was no use; the whole lot were strung up on the spot, and were only saved by the arrival of a strong body of insurgents, who came on the scene just in time to cut them down."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, for Cardwell's object in wearing that white neckcloth now suddenly dawned upon me. It was to hide the ugly scar left by the rope! And no doubt the little sailor, Montevaro, on whose behalf he had testified so warmly, was one of his companions on that memorable occasion.

"Some months later," Weaver went on, "it came round to me that Cardwell regarded Alvarez and myself as being mainly instrumental for his hanging, and had vowed that we both should suffer a similar fate sooner or later.

"When America finally stepped in I took the first opportunity of leaving the country, advising Alvarez to do the same. Knowing what sort of man Cardwell was, and that nothing on earth would turn him from his purpose once his mind was made up to a thing, I thought it better to put the ocean between us.

"We came to England, the pair of us, thinking that here we would be safe from pursuit. But our enemy, was upon our track, secure as we deemed ourselves. Poor Alvarez was the first to fall into his hands. Cardwell, of course, had some of his old comrades with him, but how they managed the rascally affair is more than I can say.

"The rest you know. I myself would have shared the same fate but for you, my good friend."

"And do you happen to have heard anything of this man Cardwell since?" I asked.

He brightened up at once.

"This very morning," he replied, "I received a letter from Paris to say that he turned up there, and it appears the first person he ran across was a Spanish officer who had fought in Cuba. They soon got to loggerheads; a duel was arranged; and Cardwell was mortally wounded. He died before they could remove him from the ground, so you see I have nothing further to fear from him."

A little boy, upon being asked by his sister what capital punishment was, replied that it was being locked up in a pantry with the jam and other nice things.

"Yes, Miss Ethel, if your sister had ever allowed me to kiss her before we were engaged I never should have asked her to become my wife." "Oh, she knew that well enough; she had it played on her too often before."

"I've been in sixteen engagements," said Colonel Warhorse to Miss Flypp. "Oh, that's nothing! I've been engaged six times myself. And look at the difference in our ages."

"Oh, no there ain't no favourites in this house!" soliloquised little Johnny; "oh dear no. If I bite my finger nails I catch it across the knuckles, but when baby tries to eat his 'ole foot, mamma's delighted."

"Is it true, my son," said the old man to him reproachfully, "that you put flypaper on the seat of the teacher's chair, and laughed when he sat down on it?" "I cannot tell a lie, father, that's the fact; but I felt sorry for it afterwards." "You felt that it was disrespectful to the teacher?" "No, sir; I felt that it was cruel to the flies."

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Shrewd Mary's Little Stratagem.

WHEN the engagement of Mary Applegate to Robert Black was announced, most of the young lady's friends asked one another how on earth she managed to catch him.

"She's twenty-seven," they added, "only passably good looking, and every one knows that for years she has been unsuccessfully striving to find a desirable husband."

A chat with her old friend, Charlie Wroithesley, showed Mary that she must pose as a serious, intelligent young woman to have any chance.

Robert soon took an interest in the intelligent, well dressed, pleasant looking, if hardly handsome, girl who listened eagerly to his most serious conversation and surprised him with the range of her knowledge and soundness of her judgement in agreeing with all his views after thoughtful discussion.

Robert was far too busy with politics to know much about society or its gossip, and Mary was right in her assumption that he at first would be ignorant of everything about her or her history; but the poor girl could not prevent her rivals and their allies from telling tales concerning her and her search for a husband, and, although relying upon what he assumed to be his judgment of human character, Robert disbelieved nearly all that was told to him, there remained in his mind an unpleasant feeling that Mary Applegate might be a charming, intelligent young lady, but was also a dangerous flirt and a schemer.

Suddenly Robert was called to London on business, but made a promise to return in two days, and poor Mary added another to her collection of sleepless nights.

Next morning Mary ate no breakfast, and, on plea of headache, went up early to her room. At midday she jumped off the sofa on which she had been lying with a look of excitement in her eyes.

"I'll do it!" she said to herself, "it's a desperate trick—it's a wretched trick—it's shameful, but they say 'all's fair in love or war,' though I'm sure that's quite untrue."

She sat down and began to write. Her first letter was addressed to Robert. It was short and simple. She ventured to remind him that he had promised to bring from his town house two or three books on the South African question, in which he took a great interest.

The next letter was addressed to her friend, Charlotte Claireville. The four pages of the first sheet were mere gossip and friendly chatter; the rest of the letter must be set out verbatim:

> And now I must tell you of a more serious matter, of one concerning which I can hardly speak, and, indeed, could not unbosom myself except to you alone in this wide world. For the first time in my life I have come to know the meaning of the word "love." I am in love, and hopelessly,—and, oh, my dear, he is such a splendid man!—not physically, perhaps, though he is very good looking, but he has a large, luminous mind, I can tell that something has crept between us, and that, perhaps, not knowingly, he believes I am only a schemer. Why can't something happen to show the falsehood of that? To think that, if I were only rich, he would know that I am sincere! I can't write any more, dear, and I am becoming a wreck.
>
> Your unhappy old friend,
> MARY.

Mary dropped one or two real tears over the letter—she was very sorry for herself and far from confident about her plans; then she carefully put the first sheet of the long letter into an envelope and addressed it to "Miss Charlotte Claireville," and she took the rest of the letter, and also the letter to Robert, and put them together into an envelope, which she addressed to him. After this she changed her dress, did up her hair, sponged her eyes with cold water, put the two letters in the postoffice and ate a big lunch.

On his return to the Lechlades', Robert Black found Mary sitting under a tree in the garden, looking very picturesque.

Her cheeks flushed when he came towards her. He did not guess that this was in consequence of guilt.

"Mary," he said, speaking with difficulty, "you have done a clumsy and I an ungentlemanly thing."

"What is it?" she asked.

"In your letter to me, by accident, you enclosed part of a letter to someone else."

She gave a most artistic little cry, and guilt flushed her cheek again most becomingly; he did not ascribe the blush to guilt.

"Oh, give it me—give it me!" she called out. "Give it back! you haven't——" she paused.

"I will give you your letter only on one condition," he answered.

"A condition?"

"Yes; that you give me the writer."

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DICK FLETCHER'S GUY.

"Oh yes! I can tell you any number of stories, if it comes to that—true ones mind you," said Josiah Sampson, ex-warder of H.M. Convict Prison Portland.

"Five-and-twenty years I served on the Island, and if I were to tell you a hundredth part only of the things I saw and went through during that time, well—you'd say I was a liar!

"This tale, however, of how Dick Fletcher broke prison—did a guy, we call it—and slipped through our fingers, is quite within reason, though it stands to-day underscored in red, in the history of Portland Prison.

"At the time it happened, I hadn't long joined as assistant warder. This meant low pay, and the roughest work. By rough work I mean long hours, and the doing duty during the day in the West Quarries, which district is always allotted to the worst character gangs.

"In these particular gangs or parties, some of the most desperate criminals might then have been found. As a matter of fact, in No. 19, the party to which I was attached as assistant, then, were, out of a total of twenty-five men, seven 'lifers,' all sentenced for murder.

"We also had with us one of the notorious Bank forgers, but only for a short period; as an order from the Home Office came down which directed that he should be for the future, kept at work inside the prison. He had been long enough in No. 19, however, to do a lot of mischief; mischief, indeed, which was destined to be the indirect cause of that which afterwards took place.

"This man's friends had money; and at different times had played every conceivable dodge to use it for his benefit—that is, for effecting his illicit freedom.

"It was a barefaced attempt to bribe the warder of our party, Jerry White (a typical Portlander), and when you say that, you say everything), that decided the authorities in London to change the sphere of McEwen's labour. No one was sorry, neither officers nor prisoners, as McEwen, being a dangerous man, we were visited daily by the principal warder of the district, rather more frequently than was altogether pleasant.

"In No. 19 there was also another 'lifer'; one, Dick Fletcher; a young fellow of twenty-seven, or thereabouts, for whom, when I got to know his history, I was more sorry than otherwise.

"His crime was fratricide, he having killed his brother during a quarrel over a girl with whom both were in love.

"It seems, from what I could make out, that the damsel favoured Dick, the younger brother, the fact having the unfortunate effect of rendering the other mad with jealousy and defeated hope. Anyway, the two met one day in the orchard of the old house in the quiet Kentish village, where dwelt Phyllis Prothero with her parents.

"Phyllis' name, as I understood it, came up; one word led to another, and Dick Fletcher, parrying with the gun in his hand, a murderous blow aimed at him by his brother, awoke to the terrible fact, as the weapon exploded, that he had shot his brother. At this moment Phyllis, alarmed by the report, came running through the orchard from the house to find Dick, the smoking double-barrel in his hand, standing over the dead body of his brother. She urged him to fly; but he refused absolutely, saying that it was the result of an accident, and that his conscience acquitted him of any evil intention.

"When arrested, he still continued to assert his innocence; and again when upon his trial at Maidstone Assizes. As so often happens, however, he was found guilty, and sentenced to penal servitude for life, the jury's recommendation to mercy on account of apparent absence of motive, having the effect of sparing him the capital penalty.

"He had served nearly five years at the time I speak of; and it was from his own lips that I heard the account of the matter, as I have briefly described it. It convinced me, and as I shall show, not without reason.

"Dick was a well-conducted, civil chap, and I could not for long make out why he had been told-off for the quarries; 'till I found out, quite by chance that the Governor, Captain Burnham, had, for some, then unexplained object, taken a violent dislike to the man; availing himself of every opportunity to show his spite.

"It appears that up to the time when McEwen, the bank forger aforesaid, first joined No. 19, Dick Fletcher—or C. 888—was a silent, reserved man, as far as his convict companions were concerned. They often tried to 'draw' him, but always failed.

"Directly McEwen appeared on the scene there was a change; a friendship springing up between the two men. They were both of them intelligent and well-informed; McEwen, indeed, speaking four or five languages fluently.

"Of course communication of any kind between prisoners was strictly against the rules, but when out of sight and hearing of the higher officials, the rule became within certain limits, a dead letter.

"I had noticed Fletcher and McEwen in close chat for several days previous to the latter's removal inside the gaol, and frequently during that time had to check and warn them.

"Warder White, as a rule, kept hard by the tool-box, near to which were the 'bankers' for the finer dressing of the special blocks of 'best-bed,' so that he could not always see what was going on in my corner of the

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quarry, where I had the oversight of ten men, including the two new chums.

"I tried several times to overhear what the pair were talking about, but McEwen, by a long way the sharper of the two, invariably provided against any eavesdropping, by keeping silence whenever I happened to approach too near.

"Upon McEwen's withdrawal, Fletcher relapsed again into his former state of taciturnity and reserve, speaking to no one, except to me, and then only in answer to my queries.

"Shortly after this the whole party was suddenly shifted to another district; that which included the moat or ditch surrounding the Verne Citadel. This wonderful excavation had yet much to be done to it, to render it complete; and so, one morning No. 19 was marched thither, taking over, on their arrival, the tools and impedimenta of the party previously working there.

"It was a welcome change for both officers and men; the monotonous 'tap-tap-tap' of the stone-dressing hammers; the choking white dust, and the eternal walls of grey, impenetrable stone, being exchanged for the more varied experience of hauling surplus material through the ditch and discharging it down a quarter-mile long inclined plane on the cliff-side opposite the breakwater.

"Here we had green slopes, and, on one part of the journey a genuine country road, while when we arrived each trip at the discharging point, we had a lovely view across the water to Weymouth, on the one hand, and, on the other, out to sea as far as the eye could reach.

"As nearly everybody knows, fogs of a peculiarly thick quality prevail periodically at Portland. This results in many days' confinement to inside, much to the men's delight, as it means idleness.

"Should a fog come on during labour, the parties are at once mustered and marched to 'shelters' provided for the purpose. If it becomes very thick, the great bell of the prison is tolled as a signal for return, and everybody is then taken in, under a strong escort of Civil Guards with fixed bayonets.

"During the time to which I more especially refer, fogs prevailed to an extent unusual even for Portland. For three, and sometimes four days in succession we were kept inside. Personally I objected to inside duty; the fetid air of the 'halls' or 'wards' together with the ceaseless strain upon one's mind, owing to the necessity for specially strict surveillance exhausting one far more than the ordinary labour duty in the open air.

"It was on one bright day succeeding a long spell of foggy weather, that a certain incident happened, which

Every limb seemed to tremble, his hands shaking so that he could scarce hold the rope.

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unimportant as it appeared to me at the time to be, acquired a peculiar significance in the light of after events.

"It was half-past seven when we passed down the bank, and out through the back postern gate of the prison.

"On we trudged, a long line of blue-smocked rascaldom, two-deep, relieved here and there by a dark blue-coated warder.

"Some distance in advance of the column, marched a strong posse of the Civil Guard, rifles under arm; while a dozen or more of the same brought up the extreme rear.

"On, across the network of railway lines, upon which trains of open trucks, and a number of snorting little locomotives were already busy, and rattling to and-fro in all directions.

"Half of our little army broke off at Quarry Gate to proceed to the 'West' district. More went straight on through the 'Waycroft,' while we, a solitary party of twenty-five men, with a principal, two warders, and four civil guards, descended by a masked incline to the 'Ditch.'

"I may just say that all strangers, except the military from the 'Verne,' were not, under any circumstances, allowed upon the Convict Works. There had, at one time, been so many cases of tampering with prisoners that the authorities were now very strict in keeping trespassers off the works.

"We found a load ready for us on our arrival at the Verne End, and after hooking on the ropes, we started for the discharge point. As I said, we had on our route to traverse the common or public road, for, it may be, a distance of a quarter of a mile or so. Here, of course, the rule with regard to visitors could not be enforced. All we might do was to keep a vigilant eye on the men, and see that they did not straggle.

"We had just turned into this road; and Warder White, my senior officer, had duly warned me (I headed the little procession), to be careful; when I saw standing behind a hedge that bordered a field, two ladies.

"Ladies they were, unmistakably; one of them being middle-aged and small, while the other was a tall, handsome girl, with eyes that even my passing glance could see were keen beyond the ordinary.

"As Dick Fletcher came abreast of the pair, I fancied somehow, that I could detect a flush break over the girl's face, while I was almost prepared to swear that she lifted her eyebrows in significant fashion; the slightest possible smile breaking about the corners of her eyes and mouth.

"As Dick Fletcher leaned over the rope, he could not see all this, until a slight cough made him look up.

"I have seen changes take place in men's faces on occasion, both before and since, but I have never seen such a remarkable change as passed over this man's features, when his eyes met those of the woman behind the hedge. Every limb, too, seemed to tremble, his hands shaking so, that he could scarce hold the rope.

"'Close up! Close up, there!' shouted Warder White. 'Mr. Sampson! ask those people to fall back till we've got by, please!'

"But there was no need for this, for hearing the warder's order, the two ladies voluntarily retired out of sight.

"There was not much in it; on the surface that is, but coupled with that which I already knew of Fletcher's history, why it might mean mischief.

"Evidently, these women were his friends; the girl, without doubt, when I come to think of it, his sweetheart! Poor chap! I was sorry for him, and it was only my duty that prevented me from telling him so.

"But the incident was not closed—yet.

"On our return with the empty trolly, and when passing the same spot, Fletcher stooped quickly and picked something up. This is against rules, as the article may be contraband. It was all done so suddenly and smartly that, only that more vigilance than usual was being exercised, the action would have passed unnoticed. Possibly had I alone seen it, it would not have so much mattered; but, unfortunately, it had not escaped the hawk-like eye of Warder White.

"'Halt! Fall in!'

"During the obeying of this order, and before any steps could be taken to prevent him, Fletcher rapidly ran his eye over the few words written on a small piece of white paper.

"The warder, seeing this, rushed towards him with the intention of snatching the document out of his hand, but it was too late! As the officer reached him, Fletcher deliberately and swiftly put the paper into his mouth, and—swallowed it!

"'Mr. Sampson! whistle for the Principal!'

"A minute or two after my shrill summons, the latter arrived; in no very good humour at being disturbed.

"'Hullo!' said he, as he came up. 'What's the matter?'

"'Fletcher, sir!' replied the warder. 'Picked up a "stiff" (a letter), and just as I was about to take it from him, he swallowed it!'

"'More fool you for letting him do it!' said Principal Heath, with whom Warder White was anything but a favourite. 'Well?'

"'Well, sir! What had I better do with him?'

"'Do with him? Why, handcuff him, and keep him with you till "knock-off." You ought to know your duty by this time, I should think, without worrying me to teach you.'

"The men grinned, and we all knew that the report, which would have to pass through the Principal's hands before reaching the Chief Warder, would not be very black.

"And so it proved, for the Deputy-Governor, before whom Fletcher appeared the next morning, merely sentenced him to a day's bread-and-water.

"But something else happened before that came off.

"The night of the same day that saw the appearance of the two women in the field of the Breakwater Road, I was on late duty inside, and did not leave the prison till past ten. My quarters were not far away, only a few hundred yards down the road leading into Portland village. The backs of the houses (a row of thirty) looked upon the prison stone yard, communicated with it, in fact, by means of doors in the rear walls of the respective gardens.

"I lit my pipe at the gate lodge, exchanged a 'Good-night!' with the gatekeeper and the Civil Guard sentry, and turning sharp to the right made fast for home.

"When about half way, I saw a tall figure, wrapped in a long, dark cloak, waiting in the shadow of one of the prison wall buttresses.

"Instinctively scenting something unusual, I loosened my cutlass in its sheath, prepared for developments.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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"'Good evening,' said a woman's voice, the sweetest and most musical that I had ever heard.

"'Good evening,' I replied, making as if to pass on.

"'I beg your pardon! Will you give me a moment, it is important—to me!'

"Now the road was, strictly speaking, a private one at this point, and practically confined to prison uses; so that any minute there was danger of someone connected with the gaol coming along. To see me talking to a stranger would therefore at once arouse suspicion, and the fact would certainly be reported to the Chief-Warder.

"'Excuse me, madam,' I said, politely but firmly 'but I have not the pleasure of knowing you, and it being late, I am anxious to get home as soon as possible.'

"'One moment!—just a moment!' she pleaded. 'You know a man named—Richard Fletcher?'

"'I cannot enter into or discuss any such matters,' I said, getting rather irritated at her persistency. 'You ought to know that it would be breach of trust on my part as an officer in the prison service.'

"'Yes—yes! Of course! But at the same time you are a man, and have a heart!'

"She assuredly was very winning and persuasive; but though I am susceptible to a degree, I am glad to remember now that I did not let the bewitchery of a woman's tongue make me to forget my duty.

"I tried to pass on, but she stood right in my path, preventing me.

"'Will you not help me?' she said yet more earnestly. 'You shall have anything you ask—two hundred!—three hundred!—*five* hundred pounds!'

"'Madam,' I said sternly, 'you surely forget yourself. Did I but do my duty, I should at once have you arrested for attempting to bribe one of Her Majesty's servants; but I am willing to believe that sorrow and grief have rendered you temporarily distraught, and that you know not what you do.'

"Then she burst into a flood of weeping; leaning against the boundary wall, and sobbing so, that she shook convulsively from head to foot.

"While genuinely sorry for her, I took the opportunity of saying that I must get on towards home, as I did so, moving away in that direction.

"In a moment the whole aspect and nature of the woman seemed to change.

"'Very well!' she said, not loudly, but so intensely that each syllable appeared to cut the air, so sharp and incisive were they. 'Very well! You will act according to your own ideas of right and wrong, you must not be surprised if I do the same. There will be no further need for communication between us, sir. Good night!'

"Gathering her cloak about her in a dignified way that compelled my admiration, she turned and sped down the road in front of me, at such a speed, that long before I reached my own door she was out of sight.

"The day following was so thick that the prison was closed, everybody remaining in.' This was Thursday. On Friday the morning broke misty, but as there appeared a promise of fine weather later on, the working parties were paraded for labour as usual, after early chapel, and march off to their respective districts.

"It kept fairly clear (I am speaking now with reference to No. 19 party only) until the head of the

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masked incline was reached, and then the fog began to roll up in great wreaths of steam-like cloud from the sea.

"A halt was at once called, and there being a shelter conveniently close at hand, the men were hurried into it without delay.

"Duly mustered and counted, the men sat round the little lean-to, while I, with White, stood at the entrance of the place, which had been built up roughly of small stone blocks, and roofed with tarpaulin.

"Thicker and thicker grew the fog, till not only could we not see a foot away from the doorway, but the mist so penetrated the inside of the shed, that it was a job to do more than indistinctly make out each other.

"I was standing carelessly straggle-legged, and I had just glanced at my watch, and told White that it wanted but half-an-hour to knock-off, and that I supposed that the bell would not ring now, till eleven, as usual; when I was nearly jerked off my feet by a man, who shot himself, from behind, between my legs, on his hands and feet.

"For the moment I was paralyzed; while Warder White was simply struck dumb with bewildered amazement. When I recovered myself a bit, I shouted to White to remain with the men, among whom the greatest excitement prevailed; and first whistling vigorously for Civil Guard and Principal, I frantically rushed in the direction I supposed the runaway to have taken.

"Strange to say, although I did not actually know who it was that had made a dash for liberty, something told me that it was Dick Fletcher.

"It was like plunging into the unknown; but I pounded on, every now and then being brought up short by a fence, a boulder, or something in the shape of an obstacle.

"I was aware that the grassy slope upon which I ran trended down to the edge of the great ditch seventy feet or more in depth, the extreme fringe of it being protected by a light hurdle rail.

"Convinced that it would be dangerous to continue at such a pace through so thick a fog, I slackened a bit, and took to feeling my way more cautiously. I had no idea that I was so near to the brink of the ravine, when I suddenly came butt up against the protecting iron railing.

"Here I paused, and tried to pierce the misty blankness. I looked over the top of the railing, and saw that the ditch was brim full of fog, appearing, indeed, like to a sea of cloud.

"Then, I heard footsteps on the grass, quite near to me. I strained my ears to listen. Nearer they came, and nearer. Then I was conscious of a human being's panting breath close to me, and out of the mist there shaped itself the figure of a man, clad in convict garb.

"It was Dick Fletcher!

"At that moment, duty was paramount with me, and I made a grab at him; but with a dexterous twist he eluded me.

"'Fletcher!' I cried. 'You'd better give in!—you haven't the ghost of a chance!'

"He answered never a word, but making a run at me, lifted me clean up in his arms; (he stood well over six feet and was built in proportion); and threw me with all his force right up the bank from him.

"I fell with a thud on the wringing wet slippery grass, in time, however, to see him leap sheer over the railing, and disappear in the ocean of mist that filled the ditch.

"The floor of the moat being mainly rough stones, there was only one conclusion to come to with regard to him. He must have been dashed to pieces.

"Five minutes after, the fog began to lift; in another ten it being light and clear enough to make a search.

"Taking a civil-guard and four prisoners with me I rapidly descended to where the wretched man must have fallen.

"Backwards and forwards we went, minutely searching every nook and cranny, and every square inch of the ditch floor, but in vain. Nothing living or dead could we discover.

"Dick Fletcher had disappeared completely from human ken.

"There was nothing for it but for Principal Heath to report the circumstance; a man missing.

"The usual course in cases of escape was taken. The black ball was raised to the top of the big staff; a gun was fired from the Verne Fort, and soon the whole island, and even Weymouth were agog with the excitement of the event.

"But it was all useless. Dick Fletcher's guy was a mystery, and likely to remain so.

"One day, however, in the following month, it was partly solved. It had become necessary to do some blasting in the rocky sides of the ditch, and about that spot where Dick Fletcher had taken his flying leap, six feet down the cliff-side, we found a ledge, caving slightly into the solid rock, just large enough for a man to turn round upon.

"Hidden away in the extreme depths was a heap of prison clothing; the jacket and cap bearing the missing man's letter and number, 'C. 888.'

"It was easy to conjecture now how the thing was done. Fletcher, undoubtedly having become familiar with the place in the course of his work at some time; *dropped* on to the ledge, changed his clothes for some civilian toggery left there for him, and then, waiting a favourable opportunity, left his hiding-place for the shore (inland, of course, was barred), where a boat was ready to take him off.

"As a matter of fact, this was actually the case.

"Warder White got the sack; but I, in consideration (so the authorities said) of my trying my best to effect Fletcher's capture, got my 'W.'

"People in the neighbourhood talk of 'Dick Fletcher's guy' to this day, for I can assure you that successful escapes from Portland Isle, are as rare as—well—as the proverbial black swan.

* * * * *

"Only last summer, a few days, indeed, before I left the service, I received the following letter from Western Illinois, U.S.:

"'A man and his wife owe you a big debt for kindness rendered. They do not respect you one whit the less, in that you did, or tried to do your duty.'

"Then followed the description of how it was done.

"'We do not append our names—you know them only too well—and should we ever meet in this world; (there are more unlikely things in life); there is a hearty handshake, and a warm welcome for you.'

"Enclosed was a banker's draft for one thousand dollars—£250."

Ralph Enderby.

Read "The Golden Dwarf."

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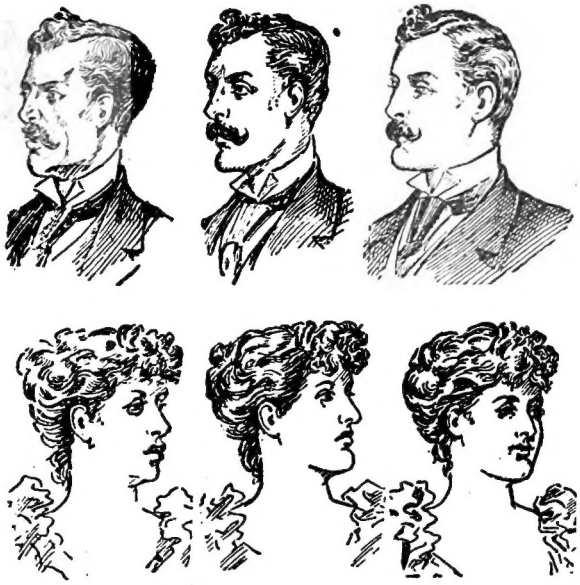

WONDERS OF FACE TRANSFORMATION.

Every year thousands of new books are published. They are read and forgotten. But once in a hundred years a new book appears which THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR. It contains some new truth which alters the history of mankind. Such a book has just issued from the press. You will read it. If not to-day, then some other day, for sooner or later it will be read by all men and all women. And when you have read it your life will be altered. It will become better, happier, more joyous. The writer of the book is Professor Boyd Laynard. The name of the book is "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." It is pronounced by the Press to be the most remarkable work of the century.

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The first part of this remarkable book consists of a practical guide to the attainment of good looks without the aid of art. Professor Boyd Laynard will have nothing to do with powder, paint, face-washes, and the like, but gives plain instructions for the scientific cultivation of beauty. The rest of the book deals with health and long life. These chapters are of the highest value.

This remarkable handbook to the three subjects embraced in the title has been a long period in preparation by the author; being, in fact, the labour of many years of diligent research and earnest investigation. The work is arranged in 127 chapters, the whole of which (in the popular edition now offered to the public) is bound in one volume. The book, although published at Two Shillings, will, if ordered direct from the Publishers, be forwarded to readers of SHORT STORIES, carriage paid, at the low discount price of

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

Amongst the numerous subjects dealt with in Professor Laynard's work the following are but a few. A Complete Syllabus, showing the contents of the whole of the 127 chapters, enumerating upwards of **500 subjects** and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the Publishers:

The way we make our own faces—Secrets of face transformation—Changeableness of beauty and its causes—Some Strange facts concerning the variableness of beauty—"Odd-faced" beauty—The countenance the counterpart of the mind—How pleasing expressions become permanent—How a person's habitual look is acquired—How permanent expressions can be transformed—Metaphysical secrets of keeping young and preserving a youthful appearance—The author's investigations into the causes why some individuals look younger than others at a certain age—Discovery of a great metaphysical secret—Wonders of the skin—Relation of the skin to beauty—Effects of mental emotions upon the skin—Effects of heat, cold, and changes of temperature upon the skin—Bad complexions and their causes—Diet that spoils and diet that improves the complexion—General care of the complexion—Construction, growth, and wonders of the hair—Why hair falls out, and its remedy—Premature greyness: its causes and prevention—General care of the hair—Superfluous hairs and how to treat them—Wrinkles: their prevention and treatment—Freckles, tan, and blackheads—Oily skin, dry skin, and loose skin—How the nose can be improved—Protruding ears and their treatment—Offensive breath—Anatomy of the teeth—Why teeth decay—General care of the teeth—Tallness, and how to attain it—Round shoulders and how to cure them—How to acquire a full chest—Perfect form and figure: their proper proportions—Thinness, and its treatment—Excessive stoutness—Care of the hands—Care of the feet—Physiognomy; or, the art of reading character from the face—Mental influences upon health—Power of the mind over the body—Influence of the mind in curing diseases—How the mind can cause dyspepsia—Effect of the direction of thought to the heart—How real diseases often supervene upon fancied ailments—How violent passions injure health—Laughter as a medicine—Ailments cured by laughter—Wonders of digestion—Relative value to our bodies of the principal articles of food—Fruits and vegetables as medicine: their various influences upon the physical system—Health preserving diet and its consistency—Diet favourable to mental exertion and intellectual culture—Influence of various foods upon our passions and propensities—The influence exerted by the mind upon the appetite and digestion—Some perilous articles of food—Light, and its influence upon health—Exercise and its relations to health—Baths and bathing: their influence upon health—The marriage state, and its influence upon health—Statistics showing the comparative vitality of married and single persons—100 professions, trades, and occupations: their respective influences upon health and long life—Sleep, and its relation to health—Insomnia, and its treatment—The eyes, and how to preserve them—The ears and hearing: how to prevent deafness—The voice: its cultivation and preservation—Memory, and how to improve it—Sudden failure of memory—Rules for cultivating the memory—Effect of some foods upon memory—Stammering, and how to cure it—Prevention of disease—Nervousness—Blushing: its physiology and treatment—Rules of life for attaining longevity—How to live to a hundred—Premature old age and its causes—Short biographies of 30 modern centenarians, whose ages range from 115 to 185 years—General principles that can be laid down for the anticipation of longevity—The eight signs of long life.

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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a Stereoscope to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, July 1st. Postcards only, please. The first prize of One Guinea has been awarded this week to Mr. F. Sutherland, of 12 Crawford Street, Tyne Dock, South Shields, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

MOTHER: "I cannot allow you to play with those naughty children, Willie. They are rough and rude." Willie: "But you don't mind my fighting with them, mother, do you?"

"PRETTY cold weather, isn't it, Bobbie?" said Mrs. Slimson. "Yes, but you don't feel it half so much as you will next winter," said Bobbie Bingo. "What makes you think so?" "'Cause mamma says your sealskin cloak can't possibly last another year."

"DID you try that scheme of ringing a bell on Johnson when he was in the middle of his speech?" "Yes, and it fizzled. Johnson was a tram conductor at one time." "Well?" "I made the mistake of ringing twice, and he took it as a compliment; thought it was a signal for him to go ahead."

HEARING a faint russle in the dark hallway below, the elder sister, supposing the young man had gone, leaned over the balustrade and called out: "Well, Bessie, have you landed him?" There was a deep, sepulchral silence for some moments. It was broken by the hesitating, constrained voice of the young man: "She has!"

A DISTINGUISHED Indian officer, Scotch to the core, never lost an opportunity of advertising his countrymen. One evening at mess he had a large number of guests, and had a magnificent specimen of a Highland piper on duty behind his chair. To draw attention to the man's splendid appearance he turned to him and said: "What pairt o' Scotland do you come from, my man." With a punctilious salute the reply was: "Tipperary, yer honour."

IT was a case of burglary and the attorney was questioning a witness, thus: "You say that you had called to see Miss Jinks, and was present when the burglary was committed?" "Yes, sir, I was," replied the witness. "Then how was it that when the prisoner dashed into the room and kicked you behind, that you leaped through the window and ran off, making no attempt to protect the young lady or give alarm?" "Well, sir, I thought it was her father."

* SCENE: Boer farmer sitting at the door of his cottage; large stack of oat-straw in the background. Enter Colonel Shovealong's Staff officer. Staff Officer: "I have orders to either buy or destroy all forage and food in this district. I therefore give you notice that I am about to set fire to that pile of oat-straw." Boer Farmer: "Bod I dell you——" Staff Officer: "Resistance is futile." Boer Farmer: "Bod vould you please ——" Staff Officer: "I can listen to no excuses." The stack of oat-straw presently bursts into flames, and the Staff Officer goes on his way rejoicing. The Boer turns to his wife, and says: "Does khakis are strange peoples. I vanted to dell him dat dis vas de oat-straw dat I haff sold to de colonel half-an-hour ago," and he thoughtfully jingled the British sovereigns in his pocket.

MR. NEWPOP: "You haven't seen our baby yet. He's only three months old, but I tell you he's bright." Jack Bachelor: "That so. Can he—er—sit up on his hind legs and beg?"

"Too bad! There has been an accident to the machinery in the mill, and they can't send us any more of those goods at present," said the junior partner. "It is too bad," replied the senior partner. "That clearance sale will have to be postponed."

"DID you take much pressing before you accepted Jack?" asked one young lady of her friend, who had just got engaged. "Oh, a lot. And then Jack is so strong, you know. He nearly squeezed all the breath out of my body."

A LITTLE North of England girl was taken to hear the great oratorio "The Messiah" the other day. The chorus "All we like sheep," where the phrase is repeated over and over again for several pages, struck her rather comically. Just at a pianissimo movement, when the rest of the audience were attending with strained ears, she was overheard to remark to a companion that she supposed it meant, "We all like mutton."

"DOES your little boy ever go in swimming without your permission?" asked Mrs. Greene of Mrs. Brown. "No, indeed. I thought he had been in when he came home yesterday with his hair wringing wet; but it seems he hadn't. He fell from a wharf." "And got his clothes wet through?" "Oh, no," exclaimed Mrs. Brown, "he fell with such force that he was driven right through his clothing." "But how do you know that?" queried Mrs. Greene. "Why, Johnny told me so himself." "Oh!"

IN a village near K—— there lives a well-known fowl breeder, who rears and keeps his fowls in a cote close to the railway. One morning he gave the hens a lot of Indian corn to eat, and was surprised to see the sparrows swallowing the corn and eating as much as the hens. He made up his mind to bring the biggest corn he could produce. The next morning he watched closely to see if the sparrows came. They came, but could not swallow the corn, and he thought he had got them. But the sparrows kept flying away and coming again, taking a grain a time till it was all gone. Then he made up his mind to watch where they went to, and to his astonishment and dismay, saw them place the grain of corn on the railway metals, fly on to the telegraph wires, and wait till the train had gone over them, when they flew down and ate the corn, thus outdoing the old fowl breeder with all his tricks.

In consequence of the great pressure on our space, we are compelled to hold over the Editor's Page this week. For this loss, readers will find ample compensation by turning to the first page of this number, where the "GOLDEN DWARF" begins.

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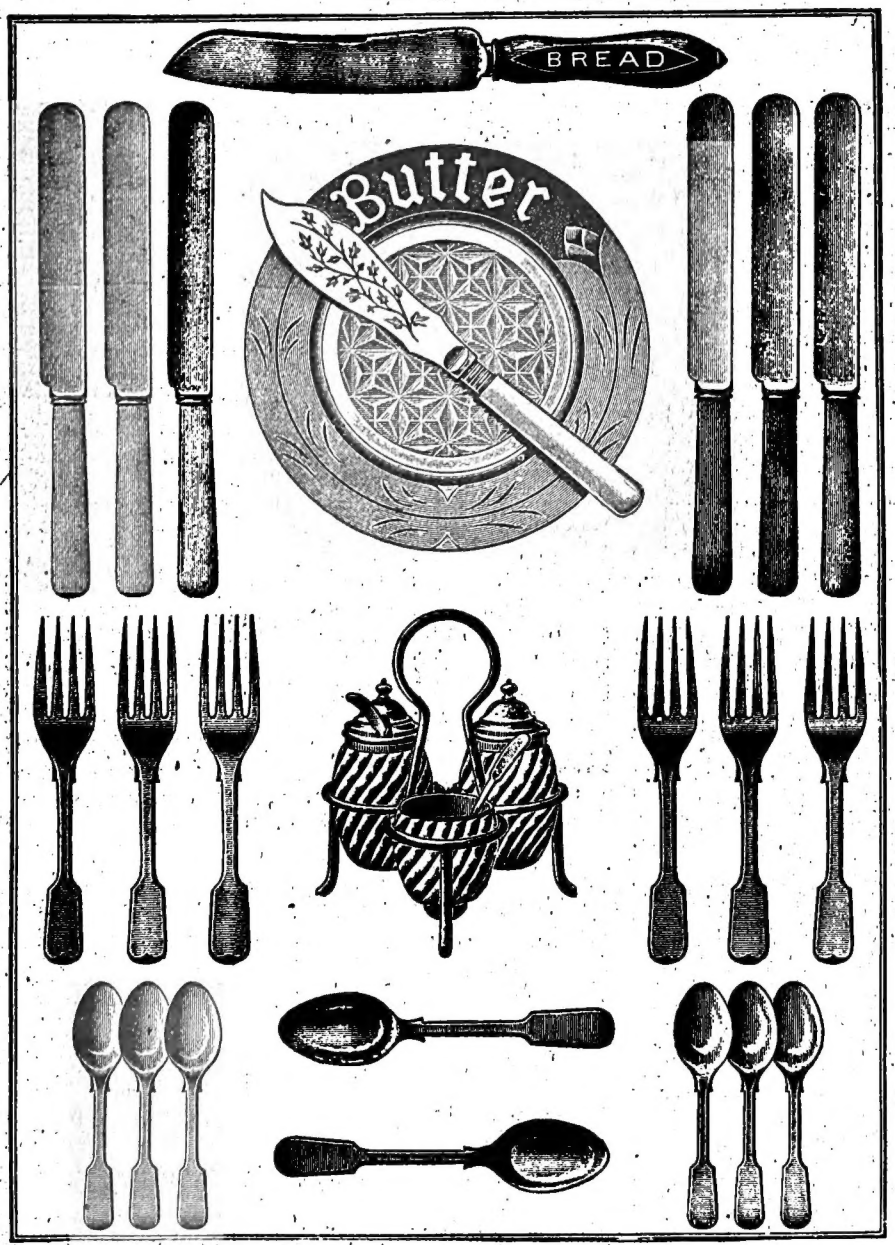

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